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CHRIST IN THE WORLD;

OR,

CHRISTIANITY

IN ITS

RELATION TO THE LIFE OF THE WORLD AND THE COURSE OF HUMAN PROGRESS.

Εγενέτο ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ κόσμου τοῦ Κυρίου ἡμῶν καὶ τοῦ Χριστοῦ αὐτοῦ, καὶ βασιλεύσει εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων.—ΑΠΟΚ. XI. 15.

"Sweeter than day spring to the shipwrecked in Nova Zembla; ah, like the mother's voice to her little child, that strays bewildered, weeping, in unknown tumults; like soft streamings of celestial music to my too-exasperated heart, came that evangel. The Universe is not dead and demoniacal, a charred house with spectres; but God-like, and my Father's."—THOMAS CARLYLE.

"Why sleeps the future, as a snake enrolled
Coil within coil, at noontide? For the Word
Yields, if with unpresumptuous faith explored,
Power at whose touch the sluggard shall unfold
His drowsy rings. Look forth!—that stream behold,
That stream upon whose bosom we have passed
Floating at ease while nations have effaced
Nations, and Death has gathered to his fold
Long lines of mighty kings—look forth, my soul!
(Nor in this vision be thou slow to trust)
The living waters, less and less by guilt
Stained and polluted, brighten as they roll
Till they have reached the Eternal City—built
For the perfected spirits of the just."

WORDSWORTH.

CHRIST IN THE WORLD;

OR,

CHRISTIANITY

IN ITS RELATION TO THE LIFE OF THE WORLD AND THE COURSE OF HUMAN PROGRESS:

BEING

The Donnellan Lectures

FOR THE YEAR 1892-93.

BY

WILLIAM M. FOLEY, B.D.,

Rector of Askeaton, Diocese of Limerick.

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TO

THE REV. GEORGE SALMON, D.D.,

PROVOST OF TRINITY COLLEGE, DUBLIN,

IN WHOM THE STUDENTS WHO HAD THE VERY GREAT PRIVILEGE

OF ATTENDING HIS DIVINITY LECTURES, FOUND NOT ONLY

A LEARNED AND PATIENT TEACHER,

BUT ALSO

A WISE COUNSELLOR AND A TRUE FATHER IN GOD,

This little Book

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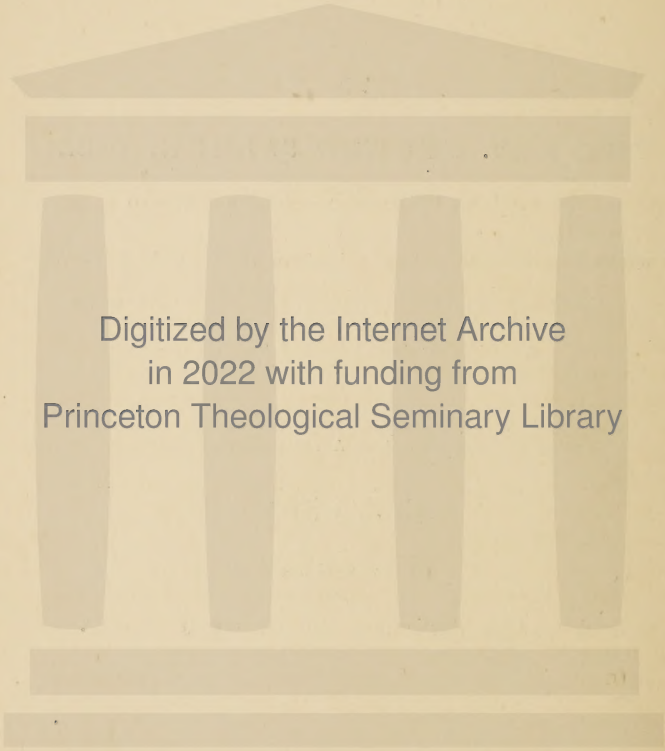
WITH SINCERE GRATITUDE AND PROFOUND RESPECT.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INTRODUCTION.

AMONGST the many questions which claim the serious attention of the historian or the philosopher, there are none of deeper interest, as there are none of greater importance, than those which relate to the nature and extent of the influence which the religion of Christ has exercised upon the life of the world and the progress of civilization.

It is impossible to take a serious interest in the affairs of the world in which we live, or to attempt to understand the varied life of our own time, without being forced to realize that the whole tone and character of society are profoundly modified by Christian ideas and Christian influences, and that, whether we will or no, our lives and thoughts, our aims and ideals, must be moulded and coloured by our Christian surroundings and associations.

And, when we turn from the life of the present to the history of the past, we find that since its first appearance

in the world, the place which Christianity has occupied has been so important, that whether we desire to understand the history of the modern period as a whole, or seek to master the special history of any given time, in either case we must of necessity take account of the work and influence of the Christian religion, and must endeavour, not only to trace the connexion of the Church of Christ with the external course of events, but also to estimate how far the inner life of the world—the general spirit and tone of society—in different ages has been affected by Christianity.

Nor is it possible to regard such questions as matters of merely speculative or historical interest. Christianity claims to be a Divine Revelation, and, as such, to be an authoritative message to mankind on the most vitally important of all subjects. We cannot refuse to consider, whether such a claim is well-founded or not, or treat the question as wholly indifferent. It is, however, both natural and reasonable that we should consider whether the claim which Christianity makes upon us is supported by sufficient evidence; and no evidence appeals to us so forcibly as that which is afforded by the actual results of Christian work and Christian teaching in the world.

If Christianity were nothing more than an ethical system—a series of rules and principles for practical

guidance, or, at most, the delineation of an ideally perfect and beautiful character as a model for our imitation—it might, perhaps, be possible to judge it solely upon its intrinsic merits; yet, even in that case, it would be natural to consider, not merely whether the Christian ideal commended itself to our moral consciousness, but also whether it was suited for practical application, and presented in a form likely to win general acceptance.

An ethical system may be almost ideally perfect, and yet be, for that very reason, wholly unsuited to the weak, imperfect, and ignorant human beings who form the majority of the human race. The philosopher may admire it, and appreciate its intrinsic beauty, while the majority of men and women may be quite incapable of understanding its principles, and wholly uninfluenced by the motives to which it appeals. It is the peculiar glory of the Christian religion that while it has, on the one hand, set before the world the most absolutely perfect rule of life and the most beautiful ideal of character, it has, on the other hand, succeeded in appealing successfully to men in every period and at every possible stage of civilization and culture. This, in itself, is a fact worthy of serious consideration; and although it may not be sufficient, by itself, to afford assurance of the truth of the supernatural events on which Christianity is founded, it is, at all events,

so far as it goes, an argument in favour of the divine origin and authority of Christianity.

Christianity, however, professes to be much more than a mere system of ethics. It professes to be a new creation —the manifestation of a mighty spiritual force in the world. If we accept the teaching of the New Testament in sincerity, we must believe, as the Church of Christ has ever believed, that the Son of God, when He became incarnate, entered permanently into a new and living relation to the whole human race; that He has never ceased to work in the world, but has ever since been present with men as the source and spring of all true spiritual life.

The Christian, therefore, cannot rest satisfied with the belief that the power of Christianity is merely the power of a beautiful ideal, or of a noble example, to touch the heart and arouse the dormant energies of our nature to activity; but must rather regard it as the manifestation of the divine presence of a risen and personal Saviour, who has promised to be with His people "always even to the end of the world."[1]

Since this is so, it is evidently a problem of the greatest practical importance to every sincere inquirer to determine how far the actual results of Christian work and Christian teaching bear witness to the reality of this divine presence

[1] St. Matth. xxviii. 20.

and divine power, and thus afford evidence sufficient to support the claim made on behalf of the Christian religion.

That a living sense of the reality of the power of the Gospel to change the heart and rule the life formed a very important factor in determining the faith of the earliest disciples, must be evident to every careful reader of the New Testament.

When the Saviour was on earth, although some, like Nicodemus, may have been influenced by the many miracles which He performed, the Gospel narrative leaves no doubt upon our minds that it was the unique power of His personality, as manifested in His whole life and teaching, which, above all other things, attached His disciples, and bound them to Him in bonds of love and abiding devotion. The Samaritans, first attracted by the report of His wonderful supernatural knowledge, were ready, after a short period of personal intercourse, to acknowledge, "Now we believe, not because of thy saying: for we have heard Him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the World."[1] Nor can we doubt that there were many of His personal followers who were ready, when any anxious doubt arose in their minds, to say, with St. Peter, "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life."[2]

[1] St. John, iv. 42. [2] St. John, vi. 68.

Again and again, in the Epistles of St. Paul, we have the appeal to the reality of the power which accompanied the preaching of the Gospel, and to the effects of that power, as manifested in the change of heart and life which had taken place in those by whom the Gospel message had been accepted.

And from the days of the Apostles down to the present time, Christians have ever found the strongest confirmation of their faith, and the most convincing assurance of the divine truth of Christianity, in the manifestation of the power of the Gospel, as they have experienced it in their own lives, or have seen it revealed in the work of Christ in in the world.

There are some who, having felt the reality of that power in their own personal experience, seem to need no other proof of the truth of Christianity. Others, however, go farther, and adopt what must be acknowledged to be a more rational and trustworthy view :—"We rest," they will say, "not on the mere facts of our own subjective personal experience, which, after all, could not afford a very secure foundation, but, recognising that what is true for us personally, has also been found true by such countless numbers, and during so long a period, realizing as an unquestionable fact the power of the Gospel as manifested in the world, to rouse into activity all that is noblest and

best in human nature, to stir men up to earnestness and zeal in the unwearied prosecution of works of mercy and love, we feel that to us, as to the Apostles of old, Christ has shown Himself as a risen and present Saviour by many infallible proofs, and has manifested His glory, as He did of old, in works of divine power and divine love.

It is possible that those who urge such considerations in support of their faith in the divine origin of Christianity are really, if unconsciously, influenced to a greater or less extent by arguments of a different kind—such arguments as are usually formulated in professed treatises on the Christian Evidences. However this may be, at all events it must be acknowledged that the manifestation of the power of the living Christ in the lives and works of those who are called by His name, as it is the first evidence which must present itself to the mind of anyone who seriously investigates the grounds of his belief, so also it is this which really makes it worth while to examine in detail the historical evidences for the truth of Christianity.

If Christianity had grown and flourished for a short period in the early days of the Roman Empire, and had then perished, and passed away from the earth, leaving behind it only the books of the New Testament, and perhaps a few other scanty literary remains, as a monument

and witness to its striking but short-lived success, we should rightly refuse to entertain seriously the question of the possible truth of the supernatural events recorded in the Christian writings, even though we might appreciate very highly the beauty and elevation of their moral teaching. It is, because Christianity has never ceased to be a living power in the world, and to play an important part in history; because we feel that it has produced results, which it seems at least difficult to account for as the effects of known causes acting in accordance with natural laws, that the evidence which can be brought forward in favour of the alleged supernatural events is really deserving of being seriously considered and investigated.

It is impossible, therefore, to deny that all questions connected with the subject of the work and influence of Christianity are of the greatest practical importance. It may be thought, however, that true views on this subject are only to be obtained by confining ourselves strictly to the sphere of Christian biography, and that it is only in this sphere that the results of such inquiries can be at all satisfactory or possess any real value.

It may be said with perfect truth that, if we desire to realize the power of Christ in all its fulness—if we wish

to see the divine perfection of the Christian character in all its beauty, and to know how far that perfection may be attained by imperfect and sinful men—we must turn, not to the gloomy and depressing pages of Church history, but to the records of the lives of great and good men who have glorified Christ in life and death, whose lives shine out like stars in the darkness of the midnight firmament, and whose memory will remain fresh and green as long as the world lasts.

The Christianity which has prevailed in the world, it may be urged, has been so unlike the true Christianity as revealed in the life and teaching of our Blessed Lord, that to confound the two together, or to imagine that the history of the former can afford any practical confirmation of the truth of the latter, must of necessity be a vain delusion. At times almost wholly identified with barren metaphysical speculations—at times degenerating into the grossest and most childish superstition, often hopelessly mixed up with schemes of wordly ambition, and allowing itself to become a mere instrument for carrying out the designs of crafty and designing politicians—the cause of so much cruel strife, of so many bitter controversies, the parent of so many crimes, so many sorrows: How can we expect that in this earthly and earth-stained Christianity—this which is only Christianity in name—we shall

be able to trace the manifestation of the power and love of the holy and gentle Saviour, or attain any results which may tend to confirm our faith in Him?

Many Christians will be all the more ready to accept this view, and to assent to the truthfulness of the lowest and worst estimate that can be formed of the history of the Christian Church, because they have already made up their minds that any attempt to form a judgment of the work of Christianity by its effects upon the life of the world as a whole rests upon a radically false assumption. To ask what Christianity has done for the world, they will say, is a profitless and impertinent question, inasmuch as Christianity was never intended to improve the world, or to make life here easier or more comfortable; but, on the contrary, to teach men to despise and overcome this wicked world, and to fit them for life in a better and happier sphere. It cannot, therefore, be a matter of the smallest consequence, so far as the divine claims of the Christian religion are concerned, to determine whether it has done anything to improve the condition of the world or not.

There are, therefore, it appears two objections which may be plausibly urged against any inquiry into the nature and effect of Christ's work in the world: first, that the Christianity which has prevailed in the world

has not been Christ's work; and second, that Christ's work was never intended to have anything to do with the world.

It is obvious that, in dealing with these objections, it is advisable to begin with the latter, since, if it can be proved that Christianity was not intended to effect any change in the life of the world, it will be unnecessary to consider the nature and extent of the results which it has produced, or to inquire how far the work of the living Christ may be discerned in the history of that Christianity which has prevailed in the world.

In order to understand the force of the objection that Christianity has no mission to the world, as such, it is evident that we must first ascertain exactly what is meant by the world when it is spoken of in this connexion. The word is admittedly a very ambiguous one, and as the different senses in which it is used sometimes shade off into each other by almost imperceptible gradations, it is not always easy to avoid confusion of thought in dealing with questions of which the subject is, "the world."

The world sometimes means nothing more than the aggregate of human beings, as when the poet says: "All the world wondered," or when we speak of the "verdict of the civilized world."

Using the word in this sense, to say that Christianity

did not come to improve the world would be tantamount to saying that it was never intended to save and bless the great majority of mankind. This doctrine has been held and taught in the Church, and, indeed, still enjoys a very considerable amount of popularity. If this view of the mission of Christianity were to be accepted, it might, no doubt, make it easier than it is to show that Christianity has been an unqualified success; but in that case we should be forced to consider whether the Christian view of God's method of government and of His purposes for mankind could possibly commend itself to our moral sense, or whether our feeling that such a system could not be in accordance with the divine nature would not be a serious obstacle in the way of our acceptance of Christianity as a divine revelation. In the first lecture of the following series, this narrow view of the purpose and mission of Christianity is examined in detail, and an attempt is there made to show that it has no foundation in the teaching of Holy Scripture.

When, however, the world is spoken of in connexion with matters of religion, when, *e. g.*, the life of the world is contrasted with the Christian life, when it is said that Christianity was not intended to improve the present world, but to fit men for a better one, it will generally be felt that the world is not taken to mean the aggregate

of human beings, but rather something distinct and separate from them.

The world in this sense is thought of, not as the men and women themselves, but as the sphere in which men and women pass their lives; not of course the mere material earth which cannot come into consideration at all in this connexion, but the whole environment in which we are placed, the whole of the things with which we are necessarily concerned in the course of our earthly lives.

The world in this sense—the world of things and of institutions, as we may call it—will include the duties which we are called upon to discharge, the pleasure which we enjoy, the objects which we pursue, the various relationships into which we may enter with our fellow men. The sphere of politics as well as that of social life, the ideals which we cherish, the aims which we set before us, are all included in the meaning of the world when used in this sense.

So long as we are contented with vague generalities, it is very easy to imagine that the world is something wholly distinct from, something wholly unaffected by the actual lives of men and women. But, when we take the trouble to form a clear and distinct idea of what the word really means, a very little reflection must

convince us that such an idea is utterly absurd. For we must at once perceive that the world in which we live is just what we ourselves have made it; that its character and condition, its whole colour and texture, so to speak, are necessarily determined by the thoughts and feelings, by the lives and conduct, of human beings, and by the level of culture and civilization to which they have attained.

In the fulfilment of all our duties, as well as in the enjoyment of all our pleasures, we are necessarily associated with our fellows, and influenced to a very great extent by the thoughts and opinions of others. What gives the world its only real interest—what makes life worth living at all—is just this, that it is a world of living men and women, to whom we are bound by many ties, whose aims and aspirations are full of interest for us, and in whose welfare each individual is really concerned.

It follows from this that, if Christianity has had any effect upon the majority of men in those parts of the world in which it has been received, the nature and extent of that influence must be manifested by their effect upon those worldly conditions and institutions which are the outward and visible expression of the inner life of humanity. We may go farther still, and say that whatever view we may take of the extent to which Christianity

has exercised a vital and beneficial influence on human life; even though we were persuaded that it had never succeeded in thus influencing more than a very small minority of professing Christians, yet, inasmuch as the lives of men are bound together by such close ties, and the actual condition of this world is the net result of all the influences, whether for good or evil, of the lives and actions of all men, it is impossible that the power for good which Christianity has admittedly had in the lives of so many very earnest men should not have left some mark upon the life of the world as a whole, or have made itself manifest as an important factor in the progress of civilization.

There is, however, one point which ought to be borne in mind when dealing with this subject, and which, if it is kept clearly before the mind, may help to remove certain difficulties and misconceptions which naturally result from confused and vague thinking about the connexion between the Christian life and the life of the world.

The world of things and institutions, as we have ventured to call it, derives its character from the character of the individuals who belong to it, and, as men change for the better, the world must change for the better as well. But, whatever changes it may undergo, the world must ever continue to be a source of danger and temptation,

against which Christians must be on their guard, and against which they must wage unceasing warfare.

As long as the Christian remembers that the world in which he lives is God's world, and sees in all its changes and fortunes the working out of a divine purpose—as long as he lives up to this conviction, doing his work as work given him by God, he has no need to trouble himself with anxious questionings as to his life in the world.

But who does not know how easy it is to become so much absorbed in worldly occupations and pursuits, so exclusively occupied with merely earthly aims, that the things in the world become an end in themselves, and take the place in our hearts and lives which belongs to God alone? When we yield to this temptation—when the world with its duties, its pleasures, its relationships and associations, fills all our thoughts, then the world is for us no longer God's world, but becomes "the wicked world," whose pomps and vain shows we are bound to renounce and war against by the solemn vow of our Baptism.

We may now turn to the consideration of the second objection, viz. that the Christianity which has actually prevailed in the world has had so little in common with the true religion of Christ that it is unreasonable to attempt to draw any conclusions, either from the present state of the

professedly Christian world, or from the history of the Christian Church in former times, as to the divinity or worth of the Christian religion.

That Christianity has been very differently conceived at different periods—that in any given period, very great differences will be found to prevail in the views of the nature and import of Christian life and Christian teaching entertained by those who profess to be firm believers in a common Christianity, may be very freely conceded. Christianity, as it was understood in the third or fourth century, was, no doubt, a very different thing in many respects from the Christianity of the later mediæval period; just as the Christianity of the later middle ages was very different from that of our own nineteenth century. In the same way, the views of religion of a South African Negro Christian are no doubt very different from those of a cultured and enlightened Englishman. But, however great such differences may be, it would evidently be a mistake to conclude that the various forms under which Christianity has been presented to the world have nothing in common but the name. The historical continuity of the Christian Church, as well as the organic connexion between the Christianity of different countries and nations, makes it clear that there must be some real and living bond of union underlying all the apparent diversity.

The Christianity of any one age is the outcome—we may say the natural outcome—of that of the age which preceded it. The Christianity of the Reformation—to mention only one striking instance—was just as much the natural outcome of that of the preceding centuries, as was the system of doctrine elaborated and put forth by the Tridentine Divines. It would be manifestly absurd to speak of either one or the other as an entirely new system, constructed from a study of the model supplied by some earlier generation. Ideas and modes of thought, which had always had a place in the Christian Church, were more clearly defined and brought into greater prominence. Possibly, on both the one side and the other, undue weight and undue prominence were given to certain elements of Christian faith. But without entering upon this question—a question with which we have no concern in the present inquiry—it is sufficient for our present purpose to realize that the whole movement was the effect of a long train of causes, which had gradually been tending towards the final result, causes which may be more or less clearly traced by the thoughtful student of history.

Nor shall we find it difficult if, freeing ourselves from the influence of prejudice and passion, we learn to form a calm and just estimate of the work of Christianity in the world as a whole, to recognise the true nature of that bond

of unity which connects together the Christianity of different periods and different grades of civilization.

We shall learn to see that what we have called the Christianity of the world has been, in every age, the world's attempt to grasp, according to the best of its ability, one great truth, and to realize one great ideal—a truth and an ideal too glorious and transcendent to be fully grasped at once, perhaps too high to be ever comprehended in all the fulness of its perfection by the minds of men—yet something which the Christian world, feeling that it is a great reality, amidst many imperfections, in spite of many misunderstandings and many relapses, has been struggling through nineteen centuries to realize and express, and whose infinite perfection and Divine beauty shine forth in ever brighter radiance, as with advancing knowledge and civilization we learn to understand it better, and more fully to grasp its meaning. That truth is the truth set forth by Jesus Christ; that ideal, His life and wondrous personality.

"The great characteristic of Christianity, and the great moral proof of its divinity," writes Mr. Lecky, "is that it has been the main source of the moral development of Europe, and that it has discharged that office, not so much by the inculcation of a system of ethics, however pure, as by the assimilating and attractive influence of a

perfect ideal."[1] It must, however, be borne in mind that it was because men conceived the life and teaching of Jesus, not as a mere ideal, not as something which was once manifested and had then passed away out of existence, but as a living and present reality; because they believed in the presence and power of an actual living Saviour, that that life and that teaching were able to accomplish such great results. If it were not for this belief, it is scarcely possible that the Christian religion could ever have made its way and manifested itself as a power in the world.

This point is more fully discussed in the sixth lecture. Meanwhile, it may be sufficient to point out that the phenomena presented to us by the history of Christianity are only what might have been expected beforehand.

It was not possible that the world should at once understand fully or perfectly the meaning of Christ's life and teaching, if Christ was perfect and divine. The true glory of the Christian religion is, that being perfect and divine, it has yet been no mere ideal, set up to be admired from a distance, but has at all times proved itself a living power in the world, capable, even though imperfectly understood and inadequately conceived, of touching and purifying the hearts and raising and sanctifying the lives of men.

[1] "History of Rationalism" (new ed. 1892), Vol. I., p. 307.

When our Blessed Lord was visibly present upon earth, His disciples, as we know, formed very erroneous ideas of His mission, and frequently failed to understand, or even positively misunderstood, His teaching; yet, nevertheless, His life and teaching formed the fit education for the work which they were afterwards to accomplish; and when, after His Resurrection,[1] with wider views and clearer insight, they went forth to proclaim the Gospel throughout the world, the Christ, whom they proclaimed as the Saviour of the World, was the same Jesus whom they had known and loved in former days; and it was the same teaching which they had heard from His lips which they delivered as the saving truth of the Gospel.

And as it was with the first disciples, so it has been ever since. It is the same Christ who has ever been in the world, guiding, enlightening, sanctifying; but from age to age the world has heard His voice, and received His teaching according to its capacity, and thus the actual realized Christianity of the world has been the expression of the divine truth imperfectly and inadequately conceived. According as, under the guidance of the Divine Spirit, we gain clearer light and a truer insight into what is highest and best, we gain, not the idea of a new Christ, but a truer and more adequate knowledge of the Christ

[1] See Note at end of Introduction, p. 30.

whom Christians have always loved and reverenced. That this is so, we feel convinced; because when we turn to the presentation of our Blessed Lord's life and teaching, given in the Gospels, we recognise that fuller light and knowledge does not set aside, or compel us to abandon, that teaching, or enable us to form a higher ideal of life; but only leads us to realize more fully, and to reverence more deeply, that perfect life and perfect teaching.

Whatever views we may hold as to the perfection of the Gospel narrative, as that narrative is the only test by which we can verify the truthfulness of our conception of the historic Christ, so, also, it must be acknowledged by all who are capable of forming a just judgment on the subject, that the representation which it gives us is essentially true, and adequate for all practical purposes.

The subject of vital practical importance for the Christian is, therefore, not so much "Christianity in the world," as "Christ in the world." If he follows with interest the course of the history of the Christian Church, and endeavours, with loving care, to trace out the various phases through which Christianity has passed, and to understand the various aspects under which it has been presented to the world, it is because, in all these, he can recognise the presence of the Divine Saviour, and learn to understand the method of His working.

Thus, while the distinction between the Christianity of the world and the true religion of Christ may be freely acknowledged, it must at the same time be evident that the distinction is rather one of thought than of fact, inasmuch as the former must be regarded as, in every age, the expression, however imperfect, of the latter—as the effort of an imperfect world to realize the absolutely perfect and divine.

Hence, it is evident that the fact that the nature and teaching of Christianity have been so variously conceived at different times and in different places, instead of being, as some of its opponents seem to have thought, an argument against the truth of *any form* of Christianity, and a fit subject for scorn and ridicule, becomes, when rightly considered, the very strongest confirmation of its claim to be the manifestation of the divine life and divine power in the world.

The teaching of any human philosopher or other great teacher is sometimes capable of fuller development as time goes on. Loving disciples deduce new results from the teaching of their master, and bring out new aspects of that teaching which could not be fully apprehended when it was first delivered, and which, perhaps, the master himself had never consciously formulated. But in the case of any merely human teacher, this is only

possible to a very limited extent. The merely human system is too narrow, being so entirely subject to the necessary limitations of human knowledge, to admit of much expansion.

To the generation of loving disciples, who develop with care and reverence the full meaning of their master's teaching, there usually succeeds the generation of hostile critics who, advancing a little farther, and enjoying the advantage of fuller knowledge, hopelessly shatter the structure which had been erected with so much pains and labour.

It is, then, by studying with earnestness and sincerity of purpose the history and work of Christianity, as it has been manifested in the world, that we are enabled fully to realize the absolute perfection and absolute truth of the life and teaching of Christ, and to understand aright that life and that teaching as they are set before us in the New Testament.

It is only in this way that we are enabled to show that Christianity has been what it professes to be, a living power in the world, a working system suited to men's wants, and really capable of exercising an influence for good upon human life.

We may go farther still. It is not, indeed, possible for as with our limited experience and limited powers to prove

that Christianity has not only approved itself as a great power for good, suited to the needs and capacities of human nature, but that it is also *the very best system* which could possibly have been devised for the salvation of mankind, and that a divine revelation could not possibly have assumed any other form which would have had the same power to appeal to the hearts and conscience of men. We may possibly believe this as a matter of faith, but any valid demonstration that it is so, is manifestly out of the question.

But the more we study the history of Christianity, the more clearly we realize the position which it has occupied in the world, and the nature of the work which it has accomplished, and is still accomplishing—the more clearly do we perceive that it has not been merely one factor amongst many which have tended to the growth and progress of our modern civilization, but that it has filled a place which, so far as we can see, nothing else could possibly have supplied; that it has been the controlling and regulating influence in the course of human progress, without which the advance of the European nations, to their present high level of civilization, would have been impossible.

It cannot be denied that if, on the one hand, Christianity has manifested itself as a power for good, and has

done much for the moral improvement as well as for the happiness of mankind, on the other hand, many and grave evils have attended the growth and spread of the Christian religion, and have even been the direct result of misdirected Christian earnestness. But, as the Christian learns to recognise the presence and power of the divine and living Saviour working in the world, and to understand something of the method of His working, these evils cease to be a source of special difficulty.

For, once it is clearly realized that, in the actual Christianity of any given period, we may recognise the acceptance of the divine and perfect truth of Christianity in the only way in which it was possible, in accordance with the laws of human nature, that it could be received by the men of that period, it becomes evident that in the evil which accompanied or resulted from its spread, we have not to deal with something special and peculiar to Christianity, but simply with one case of the much wider problem of the existence of evil in general.

We do not feel that, for the confirmation of our faith, we are called upon to deal with a difficult "question of conflicting agencies,"[1] but that realizing that having

[1] This is the expression used by Mr. Lecky, when treating of the moral effects of Christianity in the Middle Ages.

"The question," he writes, "is not one of languid or imperfect action, but of conflicting agencies. In the vast and complex organism

learned to see in the work of Christ's Church in the world the manifestation of the divine power of the living Saviour, we are not called upon to attempt the task of balancing the good against the evil: not because we deny the existence of the evil, but because, recognising the absolute necessity of the good for the spiritual well-being of the world, we feel that we can only bow our heads in reverence, and accept with humility that strange law of nature which only permits us to receive the good

of Catholicity, there were some parts which acted with admirable force in improving and elevating mankind. There were others which had a directly opposite effect."—*History of European Morals*, 1st ed. Vol. II., p. 19.

It may, perhaps, be said that Mr. Lecky is perfectly justified in his method of treatment, inasmuch as he writes, not as a theologian investigating the value of the evidences for Christianity, but as an impartial secular historian.

This distinction is not, however, of any real practical importance. On the one hand, the theologian is as much bound to be faithful to the truth, and impartial in his estimate of the facts with which he deals, as the secular historian. On the other hand, no secular historian, when treating of such questions, can altogether ignore the claim of Christianity to be considered as a Divine Revelation. If we were to admit that the method adopted by Mr. Lecky, in this admirable and most instructive work, is the best and fairest—perhaps the only practicable method—we should still feel ourselves compelled to ask, what bearing have the facts dealt with upon the question of the truth or falsehood of Christianity? even though, if we accept all Mr. Lecky's conclusions without qualification, we should be forced to admit that, so far as the mediæval period is concerned, the final result is the purely negative one that 'there is a great deal to be said on both sides.'

on condition of submitting to, and bearing with, the presence of the evil.

There is yet another reason why all questions connected with the nature and method of Christ's work in the world can never cease to have the greatest possible interest for the Christian. No sincere and earnest Christian can help seriously considering in what way and to what extent his life as a citizen of the world ought to be affected by his Christian calling, and asking himself in what sense he ought to understand the Apostle's command: "Be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind."[1]

That sincere Christians in every age have found this problem a source of much trouble and perplexity is a fact so patent as to require neither proof nor illustration. Many devout and earnest Christians have been led by a feeling, that they ought of necessity to do something to mark very distinctly their separation from the world, to the adoption of absurd, useless, and often injurious practices which could have no other practical effect than to bring religion itself into contempt.

But, as we gain true and clear views of the nature and method of our Lord's work in the world, and realize fully the position of the Christian religion with respect to the

[1] Rom. xii. 2.

world's life and progress, these difficulties, which beset us with regard to our own individual lives, speedily disappear.

Realizing the presence of our living Lord and Master in this world, in which He has placed us, we find the way of safety and of peace in keeping near to Him and following in His footsteps; and while we perform faithfully in His name and for His honour and glory the duties which He has given us to do, we rest assured that He who has placed us in the world will keep us from the evil that is in the world, and that as labourers together with Him we are helping to prepare the world for His perfect and final manifestation, and so, hastening the coming of the time when the "kingdoms of this world" shall be, in the fullest sense of the word, "the kingdom of the Lord and of His Christ."

Note to Page 21.

It is usually assumed that a total change took place in the views and ideas of the Apostles after the Resurrection, or, at all events, between the Resurrection and the Day of Pentecost. It has been supposed that our Blessed Lord, when, during the great forty days, he spoke to His disciples of "the things concerning the kingdom of God" (Acts, i. 3), drew out for them an elaborate scheme of Christian doctrine, and probably also of ecclesiastical organization. It did not seem advisable or necessary to interrupt the main line of argument in the Introduction, in order to discuss the accuracy of this view. We can hardly doubt that after the Day of Pentecost the views of the Apostles were broader and clearer than they had been in our Blessed Lord's lifetime; but it may be fairly questioned whether the difference was nearly so great as has been generally supposed. The few fragments of our Lord's teaching after His Resurrection which have been preserved do not lead us to think that there was much, if any, difference between that and His earlier teaching. Notice, *e.g.*, the answer to the question (Acts, i. 8), "Lord wilt Thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?" The Apostles still looked for the speedy establishment of an earthly kingdom in Jerusalem. Our Lord does not take the opportunity to disabuse their minds of the carnal idea, and to set forth a full view of the nature of His spiritual kingdom. What He does is simply to direct their attention to the work which they should be called upon to accomplish, as though to show that in the accomplishing of that work they should be guided by experience to the true answer to their question.

Indeed the impression which is left on our minds by a careful study of the Acts of the Apostles is, that it was only gradually, and under the continual guidance of the Holy Spirit, teaching them by means of their practical experience, that the Apostles were led to truer and clearer views of the nature and significance of the Gospel.

It is very clear, at any rate, that the system of doctrine and Church government expounded by the Lord during the great forty days cannot have contained any very intelligible reference to so very important a matter as the calling of the Gentiles and their admission on equal terms with the Jews to all the privileges of the Christian Covenant.

St. Peter had apparently no idea that the Gospel was to be preached to the Gentiles at all, until the fact was brought home to his mind by a special revelation—a revelation the full meaning of which was only gradually unfolded to him.[1]

It was only after a long and bitter controversy, that the freedom of the Gentile converts from the obligations of the Jewish law was finally and universally conceded.

The only reason why these facts excite any surprise, or present any difficulty, is, that we do not fully realize all that is implied in the belief in a living Saviour present with His Church, and guiding and enlightening it by the power of His Divine Spirit, and do not grasp the truth contended for in the text, that, from the Day of Pentecost to our own day, the actual realized Christianity of the world has been the expression of so much of the divine truth as men were able and fitted to receive.

[1] Acts, x.

LECTURE I.

THE CHRISTIAN IDEAL.

St. Matth. xiii. 33.

"The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened."

IT cannot be said that the interpretation of this parable presents any very serious difficulty to the commentator. The parable sets before us an ideal picture of the work of the Gospel of Christ as a living power working in the world—working, it may be, silently and gradually, but none the less effectively—and destined to transform and renew the whole dead mass of human society with its own spiritual life and energy.

When, however, we turn from the ideal picture to the sober world of realities: when we ask ourselves, how far has the ideal here presented to us been realised? whether we direct our attention to the history of the Christian Church during the nineteen centuries now rapidly drawing to a close, and try to estimate the effects of Christian work and Christian teaching during that long period, or,

whether we consider the actual condition of the professedly Christian world in our own day, it may perhaps seem that the result of our inquiries must be very far from satisfactory, and that, consequently, the parable which appears so easy to be understood, presents a real and serious difficulty, inasmuch as there seems little reason to expect that the promise or prophecy which it contains can ever receive any sort of adequate fulfilment. The Gospel of Christ has now been at work in the world for nearly two thousand years, and it cannot be thought unreasonable to expect that the history of so long a period should afford abundant and unmistakable evidence of the working of the divine leaven in the whole mass of human society, and of the approach of that perfect realization of the Kingdom of God in the world to which the parable seems to point.

There can indeed be no doubt that Christianity has profoundly influenced the course of human history, and has played a part in the affairs of the world, the importance of which can hardly be exaggerated.

Whether we turn our thoughts to those earliest centuries of our era, when, in the face of bitter opposition and cruel persecution, it was slowly fighting its way upwards from very humble beginnings to a position of power and predominance in the world of the Roman empire; or whether we study the history of the mediæval period, when the Church, at the height of its earthly power and glory, was the centre of unity for the rising nations of Europe; or whether we think of the great religious movements which, in the 15th and 16th centuries, marked the opening of a new era in the world's history; or whether

finally, we look around us, and consider how much is being done in the name of Christianity in our own day, with what keen interests questions connected with religion are discussed, and how impossible it is for anyone to break free from the influence of Christian surroundings: in every case we must be forced to recognise that the religion of Christ has been one of the most remarkable phenomena that has ever appeared in the world, and that it is difficult to estimate truly the influence which it has exercised upon the affairs of men. In the words of a well-known philosopher of our own day, "Christianity has been the centre round which the civilization of modern times has always revolved, in hope or doubt, in assurance or fear, in zeal or scorn."[1]

But although these facts cannot be denied, yet there are many earnest and thoughtful people to whom it seems that, after all, the so-called Christianity which has prevailed in the world has only touched the outside of things; that for the most part it has been little more than a form, which has somehow or other won for itself a position of influence in the world, and become a centre round which important movements have revolved, but that, in the history of its growth and progress, there is but little trace of that inward spiritual working, that renovation and transformation of human nature as a whole, of which the parable seems to speak.

It will not be denied that, from age to age, the Gospel of Christ has proved a power to mould and transform the characters of men, and to develop the highest and noblest

[1] H. Lotze, "*Microcosmus*," Bk. vii., ch. 5, § 5, Eng. trans.

type of human life; but this power, it will be said, has only been manifested in any age in the case of a very small number of persons, a chosen few, while the great mass of mankind has remained wholly outside that influence, and, in general, the world, for good or evil, remains very much at the same dead level as in the times which preceded the advent of Christ.

It might naturally be supposed that this view of the results of the spread of Christianity in the world, which seems to imply that, to all intents and purposes, Christianity has been an almost complete failure, would find special favour with those who deny or disbelieve the truth of the Christian Revelation, inasmuch as it must be acknowledged that it would not be possible to bring forward any stronger or more convincing argument against the truth of Christianity than that which would be afforded by a demonstration that it has completely failed to accomplish what it promised.

Strange as it may appear, however, it is not the opponents of Christianity who are most ready to proclaim that the Gospel has failed to effect any real or considerable change in the spiritual condition of mankind.

On the contrary, those who are most ready to take low and despairing views of the moral and spiritual condition of the so-called Christian world, and to proclaim most emphatically the failure of Christianity to exert any real influence on the great majority of human beings, are those who are themselves the devoted and earnest followers of Christ.

In the popular literature of the day, it is true, the hollowness of society and the worldliness of professing Christians afford a favourite subject for ridicule; and

when we turn to the works of more serious writers, we shall probably feel convinced that a low view of the results of Christian work and teaching underlies every attempt to account for the origin and progress of Christianity by the operation of natural causes; for in every such attempt it is, at least, tacitly assumed that what Christianity has effected in the world has not been so remarkable or so important that it may not be fully accounted for as the result of the ordinary laws of progress and development.

At the same time, it is scarcely ever distinctly asserted by the opponents of the Faith in the present day that Christianity has failed to accomplish its purpose. On the contrary, such writers not unfrequently evince the deepest respect and admiration for the Faith which they reject, and regretfully acknowledge the power of that Gospel, in the truth of which they find it impossible to believe. In this respect, indeed, the tone of unbelieving writers in our own day presents a remarkable contrast to that of their predecessors in the eighteenth century, when even so great a writer as Gibbon delighted in painting every page of Church history in the blackest colours, and in launching the keen shafts of his sarcasm against the vices and follies of nominal Christians.

But while unbelievers are ready to acknowledge the greatness of Christianity, and to bear witness to the services which it has rendered to the cause of humanity, nothing is more common than to find sincere and earnest Christians deeply imbued with the conviction that, in spite of all that has been done in the past, in spite of all that may be done in the future, for the spread of the Gospel and the salvation of mankind, the great world, as a whole,

must ever continue to go on in its own worldly and ungodly way, unchanged, or, if changed at all, changed only for the worse, having, it may be, a form of godliness, and acknowledging the authority of a thing called Christianity—a thing which may easily be seen to be a mere outward form, powerless to exercise any vital or saving influence on the human soul, and having nothing but the name in common with the true religion of Christ.

The true Christianity—the life-giving power to save and sanctify the soul, to mould men anew into the image and likeness of Christ, and, as a necessary consequence, to secure true blessedness here and hereafter—is indeed, on this view, to be found in the world in every age; but it has always been in the past, and it is certain that it will continue to be, the exclusive possession of a select and chosen few—a small minority scattered throughout the world, living in the world, but yet separate from the world, and obliged to recognise and mark that separation to the utmost of their power.

The exaggerated importance attached to merely evangelistic work is evidence of the firm hold which this view of the position and work of Christianity has taken of the minds of earnest Christian people. There are many who can scarcely realize that there is any difference between the work of a Christian pastor in a Christian country and that of a missionary in a heathen land, and to whom the idea that it is not the only, perhaps not the principal, business of a parochial clergyman to "preach the Gospel," would seem to be an utter absurdity.

It is assumed that the great majority of every congregation of nominal Christians must be, for all practical

purposes, as much apart from Christ, as much outside the pale of the true Israel, as the heathen who have never heard the Saviour's name. The one great object of the preacher must therefore be to convert the unbelieving, or, if he occasionally finds time to address a few words of comfort or admonition to the chosen few who are within the pale, it is to be done only by way of episode, and, above all, in such a way as to mark distinctly the contrast between them and the great unsaved majority.

It is scarcely necessary to say that those who adopt such views of the work of Christianity in the world would not for a moment admit that it has failed to accomplish the purpose which it was intended to fulfil. The thought of a world condemned, as a whole, to perpetual alienation from God may at times fill their hearts with despondency and sorrow. It may be a sore perplexity to them, as it was to Martin Luther, that "a merciful and powerful Creator should condemn so many and save so few"; but it never occurs to them to doubt that it must and will be so to the end of time, or to suppose that Christianity was ever intended to do more than save a chosen and elect few, and keep them separate from the wicked world.

This view of the mission of Christianity, gloomy and unsatisfactory as it may appear, seems to have had at all times a strange fascination for earnest and saintly Christians. It is sometimes spoken of as if it were specially characteristic of what is called the Evangelical School in the Church; but, as a matter of fact, it is not peculiar to the members of any school or sect. It may be found just as distinctly expressed in the writings of High-

Church divines as in those of the so-called Evangelicals, and even, with certain modifications, in the works of Roman Catholic writers.

Thus, to take a single example, Mr. Gore, a writer of very broad sympathies, and one who is certainly not an Evangelical in the popular sense of the word, sets forth this view in his recently published Bampton Lectures with great power and earnestness.

He declares that, "Christianity, unlike Mahommedanism, is utterly unfitted to be the religion of the *average man*"; that "the Christian standard, on account of its very loftiness, appeals only *to the few*—the most earnest men," and speaks of "the searching discipline to which the Christian is subjected in the present day in consequence of the fact that the world has endeavoured to evacuate the name of Christ of its meaning by itself professing it."[1]

It is very natural that when men, deeply filled with the spirit of Christ, attain a high standard of Christian excellence, and gain a true and keen spiritual insight into the realities of things, they should realize with intense vividness the enormity of the evils existing in the world, and should be painfully impressed with a sense of the wordliness and selfishness prevailing in society.

Men who give themselves wholly to following Christ, and seeking to understand the lesson of his wondrous and holy life, but who feel, as such men ever feel, how far off they are from that high ideal of perfection which has been revealed to their souls in Christ, find it very difficult

[1] Lect. viii., p. 206.

to look upon the condition of the average man, or of society as a whole, as anything but utterly hopeless and unchristian.

It is right, indeed, and it is well for the world that such men should set before themselves a high ideal, that they should be dissatisfied with their own attainments, that they should clearly recognise that society as a whole is very far off from the state of Christian perfection. At the same time, it must be remembered that views thus influenced by strong personal feelings, and founded on individual experience, are not to be accepted as *absolutely* true or just.

Indeed it is quite possible that, in this matter, the opinion of an unbeliever, if he views the question calmly and judicially, as the opinion of an uninterested outsider, may be much nearer to the whole truth.

But before making any attempt to form a just and truly philosophical estimate of the actual effects of Christ's work in the world, and endeavouring to answer the question, What hopes for the future are justified by the experience of the past? it will be well, in the first instance, to consider the teaching of the New Testament as a whole in its bearing on this question of the Ideal of Christianity.

For, although it is true that the prevalence of the pessimistic view which we have been considering is, to a certain extent, the result of experience of the condition of society, combined with a high sense of the exacting nature and lofty requirements of the Christian standard, yet it is certain that the hold which this view has gained on the minds of Christians, and its wide acceptance in the

Church, are chiefly to be ascribed to the influence of the New Testament writings.

The New Testament writers were immediately concerned with a condition of things in which Christians were emphatically "a little flock" in the midst of a great world lying in wickedness. The Apostles and Evangelists must have had the actual state of things constantly present to their minds; and in their writings, they naturally addressed themselves to the immediate needs and the actual circumstances of those to whom they wrote.

When the world was a heathen world, deeply sunk in wickedness and moral degradation, when so many of the ordinary occupations of life, and almost all its pleasures and amusements were carried on in connexion with, and under the sanction of, a sensual Pagan religion, it was above all things desirable that Christians should be often reminded of the necessity of coming out from the world and being separate, and that they should receive such consolations as were needed by a small and despised body, struggling against the power of a hostile world.

No need, under such circumstances, to qualify, or even to explain, such solemn admonitions as "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him."[1] No need to ask any explanation of the warning, "Ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake."[2]

It is evident that the Apostles and Evangelists had no consciousness that their writings were destined to form an authoritative standard of Christian doctrine, and a rule of

[1] 1 St. John, ii. 15. [2] St. Matth. xxiv. 9.

Christian life, which should be of priceless value for many succeeding generations. While, therefore, we thankfully recognise the presence of the Divine Spirit and the guidance of Divine Providence in the composition and preservation of the Books of the New Testament, yet, in our use of them, we must never forget the *form* under which it has pleased God that the Sacred Volume should come down to us, and should always bear in mind the conditions and circumstances of the time when the Apostles and Evangelists wrote, and with which their writings were more immediately concerned.

When therefore we find Christians spoken of in the New Testament as "a little flock"—a chosen few in the midst of an anti-Christian world—when we find warnings and exhortations addressed to them, which were specially suited to the needs and circumstances of a small community brought face to face with a vast and hostile majority, there is no need for us to jump at once to the conclusion that the description which was suitable for them must, of necessity, be applicable to the relations of the Church to the world in every subsequent age, if no other reason can be adduced for coming to so hopeless and melancholy a conclusion.

It may be urged, however, that the New Testament not only states as a fact that the followers of Christ were a small body in the midst of a hostile world, but also affords good grounds for believing they should continue to be so to the end of time, inasmuch as it ascribes the existing condition of things, not so much to the fact that Christianity had only just begun its work in the world, as to the fact of the radical evil in human nature, by reason of

which men in general were naturally disposed to reject the offer of salvation.

It was because Christ was not "of the world" that the world hated Him, and it was for the same reason that men were likely to hate His followers as well.[1]

Our Lord does not say, It is because the gate which leadeth unto life has been closed ever since the days of the fall of Adam, and has only been opened again in my day, that so few are entering in thereby,[2] but it is because the gate itself is so strait, and the way so narrow—because that strait gate and narrow way have so few attractions for human nature, while the other gate is so wide, and the way so pleasant, that the majority of men eagerly press forward on the downward path.

It cannot be denied that all this is perfectly true; and it would be easy to multiply passages which teach the same lesson; but the fact that this is so does not really touch the point at issue.

When we allow our minds to dwell upon the fact of the radical evil in human nature—when we remember, as Christians ought always to remember, how easy and how natural it is for weak and sinful human beings to choose the downward path—we must not at the same time forget that it was just for the purpose of applying a remedy to that radical evil that the Son of God took our human nature upon Him, and that it was in order that He might free the world from the bondage of sin and death that He lived, and died, and rose again.

If we realize with sadness that it is natural for men to

[1] St. John, xv. 19. [2] St. Matth. vii. 13.

choose death rather than life we must not, at the same time, forget that our Lord has solemnly declared, "I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly."[1]

We may turn from the parable of the strait gate and the narrow way to another parable which opens with a picture just as sad and just as disheartening, which tells of a strong man armed who keeps his palace and possesses his goods in peace—a sad and disheartening picture; for the strong men is, we know, the Evil One, and the goods are the lost souls of men and women—but which closes with a glorious note of victory and triumph, reminding us that a stronger Man has come, who has taken from the strong man all his armour wherein he trusted, and has divided his spoil.[2]

This surely is not intended to imply that the stronger man divides the spoil between himself and the enemy whom he has overcome, leaving to the enemy very much the larger share, but, rather, that he claims and takes the whole as his own, to be divided by him according to his good pleasure.

Although the New Testament writings are for the most part immediately concerned with the circumstances of those to whom they were addressed in the first instance, there are, no doubt, many passages in those writings which are professedly prophetic, and which treat of the work of the Gospel in the world to the end of time. These passages, however, are not calculated to throw much light on the question with which we are at present occupied. These passages indeed suggest, what no one is concerned

[1] St. John, x. 10. [2] St. Luke, xi. 22.

to deny, that good and evil will be found mingled together in the Church and in the world to the end of time, and that, consequently, Christians must be prepared to maintain a constant and earnest conflict against the evil in themselves and in the world as long as the world lasts. This fact, however, does not by any means forbid us to cherish the hope that, in this conflict, the victory of the cause of truth and righteousness will be, as time goes on, more complete, more clearly-marked, and more widely extended as the world draws nearer and nearer to the perfect realization of the kingdom of God.

In some passages of the Apocalypse—the only book in the New Testament which is wholly prophetical—we have some pictures painted in very dark colours of the awful persistence and apparently overwhelming power of evil, passages which seem to suggest that now and again in the course of the Church's long warfare, crises may arise in which the spirit of opposition to the cause of Christ will burst forth with fury and violence, and in which, to the weak in faith, it may seem for a time as though the cause of truth were destined utterly to perish. Such occasional and temporary outbursts of evil are not, however, inconsistent with steady progress and continued advance upon the whole. Rather may they be considered as a promise and pledge of the completeness of the victory, since, as the Apocalypse declares, it is because the devil knows "that he hath but a short time," since he is assured that on the whole his cause is lost, that he comes down from time to time full of wrath against the inhabitants of the earth.[1]

[1] Rev. xii. 12.

Indeed, in no book in the New Testament are the power of the Gospel in the world and the exceeding greatness and glory of its final triumph more fully set forth than in the Apocalypse.

When once we have distinctly realized that the hopeless and unsatisfactory view of the mission of Christianity to the world, with which we have been dealing, has no justification from the teaching of the New Testament, we shall have no difficulty in recognising the very different ideal which is actually set before us in the Sacred Writings. That ideal is virtually contained in the very name, "The Gospel," the glad tidings to be proclaimed to the whole creation.[1]

Setting aside merely metaphysical speculations about free will and Divine foreknowledge, assuming that salvation is freely offered to all men, and that it is really in the power of every man to accept or reject the offer as he pleases, but that, at the same time, it can be known with certainty beforehand that the great majority of men will reject the offer, it is impossible to feel that such a message of salvation could with any sincerity be described as good news for all mankind.

It may be possible to conceive that Divine love, Divine wisdom, and Divine power are so mysteriously limited in dealing with a finite world like ours, that no other kind of scheme of salvation could possibly be devised than one which, from the nature of the case, would only be successful with a comparatively small minority; but, if so, all that could be said with truth and sincerity would be, that

[1] St. Matth. xxviii. 18.

no Gospel—no really good news—is possible for a world so entirely estranged from God as this sinful world of ours.

The very fact that the Christian message of salvation is spoken of in the New Testament as "a glorious Gospel"; that the Lord Himself has charged us to proclaim glad tidings to every creature ought therefore to convince us, that we are unworthy of our Master and of our cause if we refuse to accept as the true ideal of Christianity the restoration and salvation of all the world, or to work in assured trust and confidence that ultimately that ideal will be fully realized.

And, when we come to examine the teaching of the New Testament more carefully in detail, we find that no truth is more emphatically proclaimed in the Sacred Volume than this, that the religion of Christ has as its object the restoration and renewal of the whole world, that Christ came to redeem all men, and to create them anew in His own image and likeness, that He is the second Adam—the new head of the whole race.

The verses in which this view of the universality of the Gospel is set forth are so many and so familiar that it is scarcely necessary to refer to them in detail. No verse in Holy Scripture is more familiar to us than that which tells us that it was because "God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life."[1] Scarcely less familiar are the words of the "faithful saying," which declares that "Christ Jesus gave Himself

[1] St. John, iii. 16.

a ransom for all men"—a truth not indeed to be fully manifested in the Apostle's day, but a truth which nevertheless should be made abundantly evident "in due time."[1]

We are told that Christ "tasted death for every man;"[2] that "it was the good pleasure of the Father to reconcile all things to Himself through Him (*i. e.* Christ), whether things upon earth or things in the heavens."[3]

Familiar as these and many similar passages are, we may, perhaps, often find it hard to realize their full and blessed significance, partly because of that very familiarity which tends to dull our sense of their fulness and grandeur, partly because we have allowed our minds to be warped by the influence of a preconceived theory, which leads us to take a narrow and desponding view of the power of the Gospel, and of the probable results of earnest and faithful work for God in the world.

Nor are there wanting passages in the New Testament which not only declare that the Gospel was intended for all men, and was proclaimed in all sincerity as good tidings of salvation for the whole world, but which also seem to promise that its work in the world will be blessed with very abundant success.

In the group of parables contained in the 13th chapter of St. Matthew's Gospel, from which the text is taken, although we are taught that the evil will continue to be mingled with the good in the kingdom of God, yet we have in this Parable of the Leaven, as also in the accompanying Parable of the Mustard Seed, a distinct promise

[1] 1 Tim. ii. 6. [2] Heb. ii. 9. [3] Col. i. 19.

of the wide-spread and abundant success of the kingdom of God in the world.

The Parable of the Sower—the first of the group—has often been spoken of as presenting a very disheartening picture of almost universal failure; but surely an agricultural people would never gather from that parable that, because three cases of failure are recorded, each of which takes as long to describe as the one case of successful work, therefore three-fourths of the work done for God in the world must always be expected to be a complete failure. Rather would the parable suggest to them the idea of a work so abundantly crowned with success that the few cases of failure would hardly be worthy of notice in comparison.

In like manner, it is reasonable to suppose that the Galilean fishermen[1] who listened to the Parable of the Draw-net would be led by their personal experience to regard that parable as one full of hope and promise as to the ultimate results of their missionary labours.

Again, there are many passages in St. Paul's Epistles which seem to speak so confidently of the universal efficacy of Christ's work that they have been frequently claimed as decisive in favour of the doctrine of the *future* restoration of all men. Such passages, for example, as these: "As in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive";[2] "He must reign until He hath put all enemies under His

[1] It is interesting to notice that whereas the Parable of the Sower was spoken to the multitude out of doors, that of the Draw-net was the longest of those spoken to the inner circle of disciples in the house, see v. 36.

[2] 1 Cor. xv. 22.

feet."[1] The quotation from the prophet Isaiah: "As I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to Me, and every tongue shall confess to God."[2] Whether these and similar passages are really sufficient to prove the doctrine of the future restoration of all men, or whether the thought of the possibilities of the life after death was ever present to the mind of the Apostle when writing such passages, may fairly be questioned. At all events it is evident that they refer, in the first instance, to the effect of the spread of the Gospel in this world, and thus seem to express a sure and confident expectation that the world, as a whole, will in time be brought under the living power and influence of the Gospel.

In addition to these passages from St. Paul's writings, it may be worth while to notice one from the Epistle to the Hebrews, which seems to express the same idea.

The writer of that Epistle applies to the Christian dispensation the passage from the prophet Jeremiah about the new Covenant, and which concludes with the words: "They shall not teach every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for all shall know Me, from the least to the greatest; and I will be merciful unto their iniquities, and their sin will I remember no more."[3]

This passage is of special interest as affording a striking example of the principle which runs through the whole New Testament, of applying the prophecies of the Old Testament, which declare the glories of the Messianic Kingdom to the *present* Christian dispensation. It may be admitted freely that we are still very far from the

[1] 1 Cor. xv. 25. [2] Rom. xiv. 11. [3] Heb. viii. 11, 12.

perfect state described in the glowing imagery of Messianic prophecy; but nevertheless we are bound to recognise in those prophecies an ideal towards which we are tending, and for the realization of which the forces at work in the world are amply sufficient.

In a word, this principle of interpretation forbids us to think of the glorious Messianic kingdom as something only to be brought into being by a sudden catastrophe at the end of the world, but rather as the final goal of the present Christian dispensation—the completion of the great work with which the Church of Christ is at present occupied.

To anyone who considers the matter thoughtfully, it must be evident that the question with which we have now been dealing is not one of merely speculative interest, but that the view which we take of the nature, the object, and the prospects of our Christian work must have most important practical effects.

The Christian who takes the narrow view, who believes that the invisible Church, as it is the fashion with some people to call it, must always consist of a comparatively small number of believers scattered throughout a hopelessly sinful world, may be quite ready to acknowledge, in theory, that the true believers and the ungodly professors must be suffered to continue together in outward communion in the visible Church. He may even admit that it is no part of the duty of a true Christian to form any judgment as to who are, or who are not, members of the true invisible Church. In theory all this may be admitted, but history and experience alike teach us that it is impossible to carry out the theory in practice.

In practice, the teaching of the Parable of the Tares in

the Field is as really ignored by those who remain in communion with the visible Church as by those sectaries who at various times have attempted to form communities consisting only of the true children of God.

Those who believe that the true saints must always be a chosen few, and that there is a very sharp line of demarcation separating them from those who are Christians only in name, whatever they may profess in theory, must of necessity feel an irresistible impulse to draw that line in clearly distinguishable colours. The true believers must be marked out somehow, and some sort of standard must be set up by which they are to be judged. Since it is assumed that this standard will be one to which the majority of men will not be likely to conform, it is certain that it will, in most cases, be a purely artificial one, one that may not have any connexion with the essentials of religion, and that, consequently, it will be a false standard.

Thus, the Christian adopts some peculiar style of dress, or uses some peculiar forms of language to mark out clearly his separation from the world. Or he abjures some particular forms of amusement, drawing a line between ungodly forms of recreation and those which are permissible to a Christian, the rationale of which it is not always easy for an uninitiated person to understand.

It may be that, not being naturally a person of very joyful temperament, he condemns all forms of amusement and recreation as godless vanities. Business must be attended to; and so, shrewdness in worldly affairs, and much selfish devotion to that work which has for its object the amassing of those sordid gains which must so soon be swept away and perish utterly, may be considered

as quite consistent with the demands of the Christian life, and wholly free from danger to the child of God, while innocent amusements and healthy recreations, which bring men together and unite them in bonds of friendship, and which may do much to promote and develop a healthy Christian character, are forbidden as wholly inconsistent with a truly Christian life, and involving a sinful conformity to the world.[1]

Finally the standard set up may be wholly concerned with rigid orthodoxy, and the true Christian may be distinguished by his acceptance of some cherished form of belief, or some form of words supposed to embody the *articulus stantis aut Cadentis Ecclesiæ.*

[1] Of course in the case of many persons—especially young persons—there is a natural tendency to neglect duty for the sake of mere amusement, and it may often be necessary for the Christian teacher to warn those committed to his charge of the sinfulness of such neglect. It is scarcely necessary to point out that, in what is said above, there is no intention to deny or make light of the paramount claims of duty or the importance of faithful work. On the other hand the temptation to forget that the Christian ought, in doing his work in the world, to be animated by high and unselfish views of duty, is surely, in many cases, quite as strong and as much fraught with danger as the temptation to neglect duty for pleasure. The worship of worldly success, and the mere selfish desire of gain, are surely quite as fatal forms of idolatry as the worship of mere pleasure; but it can hardly be doubted that the dangers of the latter are much more frequently and emphatically preached than those of the former. This, however, has nothing to do with the question which is dealt with above, which is solely concerned with the absurdity of certain artificial standards of Christian character and conduct, which are often set up by Christians for the purpose of distinguishing true believers from those who are supposed to be Christians only in name.

Whatever the nature of the standard adopted, as long as it is a false and artificial one, it must of necessity exercise a most injurious effect upon those by whom it is accepted. The real difficulties and temptations which beset us in our path through life will be lost sight of and ignored. The Christian, devoting his best energies to the task of conforming to the fanciful ideal which he has himself devised, satisfied that he has got the true light, and at peace in his soul, will be blind to his own deep sinfulness and his many imperfections, forget or lose sight of what is really involved in the true following of Christ; and thus it will come to pass that the standard of Christian life which was supposed to mark his separation from the world, and his devotion to a higher type of religion, will, in reality, prove a hindrance to spiritual growth and progress.

Besides this, ever since the days when, among the early heretics, the Elect or Pneumatici looked down with scorn and contempt upon the ignorant and unspiritual herd of ordinary Christians, the habit of thinking of oneself and one's party as comprising all the truly spiritual and elect people of God has ever been productive of a spirit of pride and self-sufficiency, which are surely both un-Christlike and unlovely, and utterly foreign to that spirit of Christian charity which "vaunteth not itself, and is not puffed up," but "believeth all things and hopeth all things."[1]

The evil results of attempting to draw such sharply-defined lines of distinction between the true believers and

[1] 1 Cor. xiii. 4, 7.

men of the world become even more painfully apparent, when we consider the effect upon those who are supposed to be outside the charmed circle.

Although it may no longer be thought desirable that there should be in our days a revival of the "godly and wholesome discipline" of the Primitive Church, by which notorious evil-doers were subjected to public penance, and temporarily excommunicated,[1] it is undoubtedly most desirable that public opinion should mark more emphatically than it does its disapprobation and condemnation of gross and notorious vice and wickedness, and that it would have a most wholesome effect if those guilty of such wickedness were made to feel themselves socially excommunicated.

Such marked and emphatic condemnation on the part of society of notorious and scandalous wrong-doing would be a very different thing from that with which we are now dealing—the attempt to mark out the line of distinction between true Christians and Christians only in name—which must of necessity be founded on some false and purely artificial principle.

Men of the world have become so accustomed to the idea that they are not, as a general rule, to be supposed to be Christians, that they have come to regard the fact that they have been solemnly united to Christ in holy baptism, and have been brought up as members of the Body of Christ, enjoying all the blessings and privileges

[1] At the last revision of the Irish Prayer Book, the clause in the beginning of the Commination Service, which stated the desirability of a restoration of the primitive discipline, and which is still found in the English Prayer Book, was omitted.

of the Christian Covenant as a mere matter of empty form. It would be an insult—such an insult as no one would dream of offering—to an ordinary man of business to ask him seriously, Are you an honest man?—an insult more deadly still to hint that a person born and brought up in a good position was not really a gentleman.

And yet, though one has been taught from infancy that he is "a member of Christ and a child of God," though he may have renewed most solemnly at his Confirmation the vows of his Baptism, it is regarded as the most natural and laudable thing in the world to ask him, Are you a Christian? or to suggest doubts as to whether he is really and truly in a state of salvation.

If it be said, people in business as a general rule feel the obligation which rests upon them to maintain an honest name, people in high position feel their obligation to live up to the standard required of a true gentleman; but professing Christians do not feel in the same way the obligations imposed upon them by their Baptismal vows: the answer is, that it is just the false view which has prevailed so widely of the mission of Christianity to the world; the general acceptance of the idea that the majority of people are not likely to be, and are not to be expected to be, Christians in any real sense, that is mainly responsible for this unsatisfactory state of things. It is because of this, that we are so often brought face to face with the melancholy spectacle of men of the world, upright and honourable in their dealings, by no means destitute of the fear of God, by no means indifferent to truth and righteousness, who yet, having come to take it for granted that they are not

expected to be Christians, that they have not yet laid the foundation of a truly Christian life, never trouble themselves about the obligations of the Christian religion, never ask themselves sincerely what is meant by the following of the Lord Jesus Christ, and never realize the necessity for continued growth and progress, but content themselves with a sort of half pagan religion—an imperfect and stunted thing—which is, however, supposed to be good enough for the *average* man of the world.

Sometimes, too, it happens that the man of the world comes to look with a certain amount of contempt upon the Christian religion because he has found it identified with the practice of some harmless absurdity, or with the belief in what seems to him some useless shibboleth ; something, which he plainly sees, has no effect in making those who adopt it lead lives in any respect higher or better than those of the average everyday people of the world.

We can hardly doubt that it was in consequence of the realization of some of these evils and dangers, and, more especially, because of the repugnance naturally excited by the idea that Christianity was never intended for the average man, that a somewhat different classification has often been attempted—a classification which aims at distinguishing, not "between the righteous and the wicked, those who serve God and those who serve Him not," but rather between different types and classes of real Christians according as they fashion their lives by a lower or a higher standard.

On behalf of this classification it may be urged that, while, on the one hand, it does not ignore the unquestionable fact that in every age there have been a comparatively

small number who seem to have shaped their lives in accordance with certain counsels of perfection, and whose self-denial, earnestness, and devotion have presented a marked contrast to the easy-going and imperfect service of the great majority of professing Christians; on the other hand, it does not outrage our sense of justice and truth by refusing to the latter any share in the blessings of the Christian covenant, and does not make it impossible for us to believe in the reality of the mission of Christianity to the whole world.

This idea—that there are two types of Christian life which may be clearly marked off and distinguished from each other—formed the basis of the whole theory of monasticism; but it has not been by any means confined to the advocates of monasticism, or connected solely with the distinction between the monastic and the secular life. It is an idea which has many enthusiastic advocates in the present day, and which seems to enjoy a considerable amount of popularity. For this reason, if for no other, it deserves at least a passing notice in such an inquiry as that in which we are at present engaged.

That the lives of Christians differ widely with respect to the degrees of holiness and self-devotion by which they are characterized, may be very freely admitted. Indeed, two of our Blessed Lord's parables distinctly teach us that, amongst the "good and faithful servants"[1] of the Lord, some will be found worthy at the final judgment of a higher reward than others.

It does not, however, follow from this that *we* are at all

[1] St. Matth. xxv. 14, *sqq.*; St. Luke, xix. 12, *sqq.*

competent to form an opinion as to the relative worthiness of different lives, or that it is possible for us to distinguish different types of Christian life from one another; and indeed, the Parable of the Labourers in the Vineyard seems to have been specially intended to impress upon us that our own opinions on this subject are by no means likely to be in accordance with the divine judgment.

It may perhaps seem to us that the life of an ordinary Christian who gives himself to the faithful discharge of commonplace duties in the world is a life of lower type than that of one who has obeyed a call to devote himself to missionary work, or to some other special branch of Christian service in which he is exposed to peculiar difficulties and trials, or has to exercise some very special kind of self-denial. But, for all we know, the life of the former may involve as much real self-denial, may call for as much watchfulness and earnestness, and may afford as severe and searching a probation as that of the latter. It is only the Eternal Judge, to whom the secrets of all hearts are manifest, who can declare infallibly which life is higher and more truly Christ-like, or to what extent one is higher than the other.

Holy Scripture does not afford any ground for believing in a variety of types of Christian life; much less does it encourage us to hope that different types can be distinctly classified and determined as higher and lower respectively. It sets before us one perfect life as our great example. It teaches us, in whatever circumstances we are placed, and in whatever work we are engaged, to seek to enter into the spirit and secret of that life, and thus "to grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus

Christ";[1] and it impresses upon us that the way of progress and advance is the only true way of safety. Now it is just this teaching which is certain to be practically ignored by the advocates of this theory of different definitely-marked types of Christian life.

The Christian who is supposed to belong to the lower class—to be in the way of salvation, though not in the way of the highest blessedness—may be exhorted to go up higher and enjoy the privileges of a higher and holier state; but constituted as men are, it is only too likely that he will rest content with the lower state, once he believes it is a state of safety, and will be satisfied with that to which he has already attained.

On the other hand, it is evident that those who believe themselves to have reached the higher sphere, must be exposed to the special dangers of spiritual pride, and of trusting in a more or less arbitrary standard of excellence to the very same extent, whether they look upon those outside their own circle as being in no sense children of God, or merely classify them as Christians of a lower type.

Nor is it possible to resist the conviction that the form in which this doctrine of a higher life is most commonly put forward in the present day is open to the very gravest objections.

In so far as the advocates of that doctrine proclaim the possibility and importance of attaining a high degree of real holiness in the present life, in so far as they emphasize the great truth that holiness is a gift of God, and declare

[1] 2 Pet. iii. 18.

the necessity for living Faith as a factor in the work of sanctification, we cannot but acknowledge the value and importance of their work.

But, when it is taught that by the mere exercise of faith the Christian may attain a state of perfect sinlessness, which is at the same time a state of calm and undisturbed repose—a state in which there is no longer any need to struggle against temptation, and apparently no need for special watchfulness—we feel that it is impossible that any protest can be too strong which is directed against such teaching. For a weak human being, circumstanced as men are in this world, and surrounded by so many and such subtle forms of temptation, can we conceive anything more certain to be fatal than to fancy that he has attained to such a state as has been described? The most ordinary common sense must convince us that anyone who is thus reposing in fancied security must infallibly fall, and fall grievously, under the pressure of any sudden and unusual temptation, while in the absence of such temptation he must sink into a state of indolence in which the powers of reason and conscience cease to be actively exercised, a state which must inevitably tend to stagnation and spiritual death. Surely, in this case it is more than probable that "the last shall be first and the first last."

But if, in all earnestness and sincerity, we refuse to form judgments which must be more or less hasty and uncertain; if we abstain from drawing distinctions which must always be more or less arbitrary, whether we attempt to distinguish different types of Christian life, or to mark the boundary line between the two classes—the righteous and the wicked—who are only to be definitely

separated at the Day of Judgment; if we account as brethren all who are members of the visible Church, and take it for granted that they are really and truly followers of Christ unless they openly oppose and reject the Gospel: we shall soon begin to realize that the Spirit of Christ has penetrated much more deeply into the heart of society, and has exercised a real influence over a much wider area, than a hasty and superficial judgment might lead us to suppose.

With the fuller knowledge and truer insight which we shall thus gain of the working of the Gospel as a living power in the world, the Scriptural ideal of a universal salvation and restoration of the whole race will no longer be thought an idle dream, but a great practicable and attainable end for which we may work with faith and courage.

We shall, indeed, be obliged to acknowledge the presence of many and great evils in the world, while the weakness, the imperfections, the sinfulness, displayed in the lives of those who are called by the name of Christ will, no doubt, often give rise to saddening and depressing thoughts.

But those who have made the greatest progress in saintliness of life will be the last to admit that the existence of evil and imperfection in their fellow-men is a proof that the Gospel has exercised no real influence upon their lives. There is a Christian Ideal for the individual as well as for the world—the ideal of a perfectly holy and Christ-like life—an ideal which every sincere follower of Christ ought to strive after and hope to attain.

But the holiest and best men are those who always feel most deeply how far off they are from the attainment of their ideal; and feeling this, they will always be the most unwilling to form harsh or unfavourable judgments of their fellows.

The most earnest and devoted Christian will always be the one most ready to say, Who am I that I should judge my brother; I who am conscious of so much that is sinful in my own heart and in my own imperfect life? What do I really know of his inner life, his difficulties, his struggles. He may seem to be weak, while I seem to be strong; his life may not seem to be so fair a thing in the eyes of the world as mine; but then, even if it be so, his circumstances may not have been so favourable as mine, and he may have been subjected to temptations such as I can have no conception of. To his own Master he stands or falls, and may I not see so much good mingled with much that is evil or imperfect; so many signs of a sincere striving after better things that I must believe and trust that he too is being led by a Father's hand, and hope that he will be found hereafter by my side in the Father's eternal home.

But, it may be objected, although we acknowledge that it is not for us to judge our brethren, Can we help feeling that there are many who, while they may not be wholly uninfluenced by the Gospel of Christ, must, when they leave this world, be so imperfectly sanctified that they cannot be fit to stand in the presence of God? Must we not therefore conclude that there will be in the future life some place of æonian suffering in which the work of preparation will be completed?

Imperfectly sanctified the best of us must be when we leave this world; and, realizing this, we cannot indeed doubt that in the future life, provision will be made for our further growth and progress in holiness. But why should it be necessary to drag in this clumsy device of a place of purificatory suffering, for the existence of which there is not a tittle of positive evidence?

Suffering is not the only means—not even the principal means—by which the work of sanctification is accomplished in this world. Why should it be so in the world to come?

It is far more natural—that is, more in accordance with what we experience of God's dealings with us in this life—to believe that all God's children will be found together in the world to come in one eternal home, living and working for one another; the stronger helping the weaker; those who have advanced farthest in the way of holiness helping those who have made but little progress, and all rejoicing together in the blessed consciousness of a Heavenly Father's presence and a Heavenly Father's love.

It will no doubt be an awful thing to stand in the presence of God, but, after all, we are all in His presence here every day of our lives, just as really as we shall ever be; and though, weak and sin-stained as we are, we feel that we might well shrink from the thought of that awful presence which is so very near us, yet can we look up with humble trust and loving confidence because we know that it is the presence of our gracious and reconciled Father.

But even though we may recognise with thankfulness that the Gospel of Christ has exercised a wide-spread and powerful influence upon the nations by whom it has been

received, even though we may feel assured that in the future it will make its influence felt more deeply and more widely still throughout the whole wide world, yet we may feel assured that, in the future as in the past, there will be times when the words of comfort addressed in the New Testament to the little flock in the midst of the wicked world will appeal with special force to the hearts of devout servants of Christ, and the warnings against love of the world and conformity to the world will seem to be specially needed.

Earnest men as they draw nearer to God, and are more deeply filled with the Spirit of Christ, must of necessity feel more strongly the imperative demands of their Christian calling, must learn to distinguish more clearly between true and false, between what is Christlike and what is not.

Thus it happens that earnest Christians sometimes find themselves in conflict with popular opinions, and feel bound, if they are true followers of Christ, to offer a strenuous opposition to views and practices which are generally received with complacency. It is not because the society in which they move is utterly godless and unchristian, but simply, because they themselves see more clearly all that is implied in the following of Christ.

In fighting for Christ they are likely to be misunderstood, bitterly criticised, perhaps hated and despised. At such times, therefore, the Christian turns with thankfulness to the stories of Christian heroism which have come to us from early times. At such times he feels the comfort and power of those lessons of the New Testament of which we have spoken.

For it is in such times of conflict that one needs specially to be reminded that Christ must be more to him than all the world besides, that he who loves anyone or anything more than Christ is not worthy of Him; that Christ's soldiers must be ever ready to obey His call and to fight to the death for Him, no matter how great may be the odds, how strong the opposing power.

But if the call comes to us thus to stand up manfully for some principle which we believe to be important, it will surely not diminish our earnestness or make us a whit less faithful to our Master if we are able to feel and acknowledge with thankfulness that those who oppose and perhaps despise us may yet be truly and indeed fellow-servants with us of our common Master. Rather will this thought lead us to look forward with more intense longing to the coming time when we shall be all gathered together in one eternal home; when, all the mists and darkness which obscured our vision here below shall be cleared away, and we who now "know in part shall know even as also we are known."[1]

Earnest men, deeply impressed with the belief that at best very little could be done for God in the world, have often been moved to put forth all their energies and give all their powers of mind and body to the work of God, that so, if possible, a few brands might be plucked from the burning.

With how much deeper earnestness, with how much greater zeal, ought we to give ourselves to Christ's service if, instead of cherishing this melancholy and unworthy

[1] 1 Cor. xiii. 12.

view, we sincerely believe that we are placed by God in His own world—a world which He has redeemed to Himself, and which may—nay, which must—be won for Him.

Then indeed the heavens are opened to us, and the light of hope streams upon us from on high. There is much to be done for God; the field is wide, and the result must be glorious.

Already Christ has won many glorious victories; but victories greater and more glorious still are yet to be won.

"Wherefore, brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know"—not that very little will ever be accomplished in spite of all your efforts—but "forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord."[1]

[1] 1 Cor. xv. 58.

LECTURE II.

THE FUTURE LIFE.

HEB. xiii. 14.

"For here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come."

THE shortness of human life and the transitory nature of all earthly gains and earthly enjoyments have in every age been favourite themes with philosophers, poets, and teachers of religion.

That great teachers should have found it necessary to dwell so frequently, and with so much earnestness and eloquence, upon the very obvious fact that "here we have no continuing city," would seem to suggest that that fact does not naturally make a very profound impression on the minds of men, or exercise so great an influence over their lives as might have been expected beforehand.

Nor can it be denied that this is indeed the case. Whether the world in which we live is the best of all possible worlds or the worst, or, as most sensible people believe, neither the one nor the other, but a very tolerable medium between the two; it is, at all events, a world which affords objects of the most absorbing interest to

human beings; offering, as it does, so many gains and pleasures, for which men think it worth while to strive with energy and earnestness, and from which, when they have been attained, they derive much real satisfaction and enjoyment—a world in which men may set before them many noble aims, and cherish many noble forms of ambition; and in which human beings are bound together by many bonds of friendship and love, and find much to satisfy those social instincts and human affections which form so important an element in our nature.

Surrounded by such objects, cherishing such aims and aspirations, finding so much to interest us, and so much that calls forth into fullest and most vigorous exercise all our powers and faculties, it is not, after all, so very wonderful that we should throw ourselves heart and soul into the affairs of the world, and should be little troubled by the thought that

> "Time driveth onward fast,
> And in a little time our lips are dumb";

that in a very few years we ourselves, and all those things in which we are so deeply interested, shall have passed away for ever, and, "Like the baseless fabric of a vision, leave not a rack behind."

Thus it seems that as, on the one hand, we have been made for this world in which we live, so, on the other hand, the world in which we live has been so constituted as to be a suitable home for us. Although "we look before and after"—although we cannot but be aware that our time here must be comparatively short, it seems to be a law of our nature that we should be so keenly interested

in our work and our earthly surroundings, as to take no account of the inevitable end which is drawing on so rapidly.

Since this is so, Does it not follow that the words, "Here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come," can never become the watchword of any considerable proportion of the human race, and that therefore, since the belief in life everlasting is a fundamental article of the Christian Faith, it is idle to expect that that faith will ever be accepted in truth and sincerity by the majority of human beings?

A few noble souls will be found in every age who have learned to see through, and despise, the hollowness and vanity of earthly things, and who, finding no true home on earth, will look forward with hope and longing to a higher and better world to come. Others there may be who, oppressed with a greater share of sorrow or disappointment than is usually alloted to man on earth, will find their only consolation in the hope of a future life in which they shall find compensation for all the wrongs and miseries of a dark and sorrowful existence, and in which all sorrow shall be turned into joy. These, however, will always be the few; and it may, perhaps, be thought that if it were otherwise, the work of the world would soon come to a stand-still, and the course of human progress be permanently arrested. For, if the great majority of mankind were to have a constant and vivid realization of the shortness of earthly life, and were at the same time to have the glories of the future world ever present in their thoughts, it might be supposed that they could not continue to devote themselves to the performance of their duties in

the world with the necessary earnestness and energy, while they would cease to consider the gains and enjoyments of the world to be worth the trouble which must be taken in order to acquire them.

It is quite possible, starting from such considerations as these, to make out a very plausible case for the theory that the world was originally created chiefly for the purpose of serving as a sphere for the culture of a very small minority of human beings, for what may be called the cream of humanity, and of bringing them to the highest possible state of perfection, and that the great majority of human beings have been called into existence principally in order to serve, as certain modern philosophers have expressed it, as a kind of "culture manure" for the benefit of the higher and nobler members of the race.

It seems scarcely possible to maintain such a view without, at the same time, believing in the final annihilation of the ungodly. For, on this hypothesis, the ungodly majority, those "who have their portion in this life," are really fulfilling an important part in carrying out the Divine purpose of creation; and it would be manifestly both cruel and unjust to consign them to future misery for doing neither more nor less than they were intended to do. But, however plausible this view of the purpose of creation and the destiny of the human race may appear at first sight, it is certain that, when it is fairly and thoughtfully examined in all its bearings, it will be deliberately and emphatically rejected by the verdict of conscience.

Our moral sense assures us that this is not a case

to which the analogies drawn from lower nature can be rightly applied. That thousands of seeds perish in order that one beautiful plant may be brought to perfection; that some of the lower animals lay hundreds of eggs of which only a very few will ever be hatched; that all through nature the struggle for existence goes on, and the law of the survival of the fittest is sternly enforced: these things, after all, do not grate upon us or offend our sense of justice or fitness. But, just because man is a being endowed with a moral and spiritual nature, we feel that his life and destiny are of infinitely greater importance than those of beasts and birds, of plants and flowers. We feel, and cannot but feel, that human life has an *absolute worth*, and so cannot possibly be compared with the life of any of these lower creatures. Our reason and our moral sense, therefore, forbid us to accept the idea that the great majority of human beings have been called into existence, solely or chiefly, in order that their lives might be wasted and destroyed for sake of developing to the highest possible perfection the lives and characters of a few select and chosen spirits. Besides this, although it is true that many varieties of character and disposition, and many different degrees of goodness, are to be found amongst men, yet there is no such fundamental difference, no such difference of mould and character between one man and another, as this view would seem to require. Indeed, if it were necessary for us either to accept this hypothesis, or to give up the belief in a future life altogether, we should feel constrained to accept the latter alternative, and to conclude that man was made for this world and this world alone, and that

the longing for a future life ought, wherever found, to be treated as the result of a morbid and unhealthy state of mind, which ought by all means to be checked and discouraged.

If, however, we believe, that the Gospel was intended in truth and sincerity to be a message of salvation for all mankind, and that the Son of God took human nature upon Himself for the purpose of creating all men anew, and raising them to the highest perfection of which human nature is capable, we must be forced to conclude that, as the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead and the life everlasting has at all times been a fundamental article of the faith, Christ and His Apostles must have believed it possible that that doctrine might come to be universally and sincerely accepted. It is natural, therefore, that we should turn to the New Testament in the hope that we shall find the Christian doctrine of a future life presented to us in its pages in such a form as may remove all our difficulties.

When, however, we examine the teaching of the New Testament on the subject of the future life, it may perhaps seem to us at first sight that the result is somewhat disappointing.

The reality of the future life is indeed kept constantly before our minds in the New Testament writings. That the lot of the righteous will be one of perfect joy and happiness; that for them, "there shall be no more pain, no more sorrow or crying, no more death";[1] that, on the other hand, the wicked shall be condemned to an existence in which there will be much wretchedness and misery; that

[1] Rev. xxi. 4.

in their abiding place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth: these facts are set forth plainly enough; but, beyond these rather vague generalities, there seems to be absolutely nothing on which the imagination can really take hold.

Our future *in this world* interests us, so that we can form plans, and cherish hopes, for the years that are before us, just because we can picture that future to ourselves in imagination, and can realize vividly how we shall feel and act under given circumstances.

But, not only have we no data for forming a picture of the conditions of the life after death, but it scarcely seems possible that such data should be afforded to us.

The difference between time and eternity is so infinite, the very idea of an unending existence is so stupendous, and one which we find it so difficult to grasp, when we try to reflect seriously and candidly on the subject, that we may well doubt whether any revelation of eternal life could be given which would be at all intelligible to us. We may indeed paint fancy pictures to ourselves of the circumstances and conditions of our future lives in heaven; but such pictures fade away as rapidly as they are formed, as we come to realize that they must of necessity, being wholly drawn from our present experience, contain elements which are evidently inconsistent with the conditions of an everlasting life.

> "Poor fragments all of this low earth,
> Such as in sleep would hardly soothe
> A soul that once had tasted of immortal Truth."[1]

The Christian doctrine of the Resurrection of the Body

[1] KEBLE, *Christian Year*, Sixth Sunday after Epiphany.

gives us, as Professor Mozley remarks, an assurance of the reality of the future life, such as was wholly wanting to any of the speculations of Pagan antiquity, enabling us to feel that, in the future world, we shall still be real, living, human beings.[1]

But although we must thankfully acknowledge that this is the case, yet we cannot help feeling, that the doctrine of the Resurrection of the Body is itself beset with difficulties, and that it is not easy for us to imagine bodies suited for an everlasting existence. The nearest approach to definite information about our future selves which is to be found in the New Testament is what is told us in the 15th chapter of St. Paul's 1st Epistle to the Corinthians. There we learn that in the future life we shall have bodies—spiritual bodies—not bodies of flesh and blood in

[1] "Solidity is guaranteed to the Christian's future life by the doctrine of the Resurrection of the Body. The resurrection of the body is indeed an insoluble mystery; the evidence of it rests upon the evidences of revelation; but assumed to be true, the effect of this doctrine upon the nature of the future state is plain, namely, that it provides for the solidity of our existence in that state. It secures the truth and completeness of the life in question, that it will have everything analogous to those properties of this earthly life which gives to this earthly life its reality, qualities which truly correspond to the palpableness and tangibleness of our present corporeal nature."

Again, "by virtue of the article of the Resurrection of the Body, all that is analogous to the substance, the stability, delineation of form, the distinction of local presence, the sense of solidity which attaches to this earthly life, belongs also to the life everlasting. This was a doctrine divided by the whole width of the poles from the Pagan doctrine of a future state. It was another truth, a different truth." —J. B. Mozley, "Lectures and Theological Papers," 1883, Lect. III., pp. 29, 39.

the ordinary sense of the words, but bodies glorified and incorruptible. Devout persons have often busied themselves with speculations as to the nature and capabilities of these spiritual bodies. They have pictured to themselves material frames of a kind of etherial and highly attenuated substance, endowed with powers of sensation and capacities for action similar in kind to those which we have at present, but differing vastly in degree—the powers of sensation being much keener, the active powers greater, more immediately under control, and utterly incapable of fatigue. The reality may, perhaps, be found hereafter to bear some resemblance to these fancy pictures, or, it may be, as different from them as possible. One thing only is made clear by all such speculations, and that is, that we have absolutely no grounds to go upon if we attempt to form a definite conception of the nature of a resurrection body.

Again, we are quite as much in the dark as to the circumstances in which we shall be placed in the future world, and the occupations in which we shall be engaged.

Descriptions of the Heavenly World are, indeed, given us in the New Testament, chiefly in the glowing imagery of the Apocalypse. We are told of the Heavenly City with its gates, and towers, and walls; its golden streets; its brilliancy of pearls and precious stones; of the Heavenly Garden of Eden, with its trees and river of life; of the white-robed multitudes ceaselessly occupied with hymns of praise and acts of adoration.

But it is at once evident that all these descriptions are, in the strictest sense, merely figurative and symbolical.

They are beautiful and deeply significant when regarded as what they are—beautiful poetical imagery; but if we think of them as anything more than this, the beauty at once vanishes, and we find ourselves on the verge of absurdity.

If, indeed, these descriptions were generally regarded as sober and scientific representations of the conditions of the future life, there would be some justice in the taunt which has been levelled against the views of Christian teachers on this subject, that "Divines have painted the glories of the future life in such colours that no one could possibly desire them."[1]

It would, however, be a great mistake to infer from all this that we know nothing about the future life, or that the New Testament contains no real revelation on the subject, such as might tend to make that life an object of sincere desire and longing on the part of human beings.

Imagery, after all, must be imagery of something, Figurative language must represent some sort of reality. It follows, therefore, that what is revealed to us in the New Testament about the future life must be learned by endeavouring to grasp the meaning of the images under which the great truth of the life everlasting is there presented to us.

That we "shall shine as the sun or the stars,"[2] or that we shall walk "in white robes, with palms in our hands,"[3] may not seem a particularly desirable prospect, if the words are understood literally. But when the brightness of the

[1] W. R. Greg, "Enigmas of Life."

[2] Dan. xii. 3, and St. Matth. xiii. 43. [3] Rev. vii. 9.

sun and the purity of the robes speak to us of that perfect purity of heart and life which the true Children of God strive after and long for here below, but to which they can never perfectly attain ; when the palm-branches are understood as merely symbols of an assured victory over those sinful desires and manifold temptations against which we have so often to struggle wearily and painfully in our earthly conflict, we feel that we have a revelation which is well calculated to bring joy and gladness to every true and faithful heart.

The Heavenly City, with its golden streets and gates of pearl ; the pleasant fields and gardens ; the abundant banquet of which the nations of the saved shall partake together—these are figures indeed, but of what? Surely, of a perfect state of society, in which men will live together, work together, rejoice together in perfect relations of mutual love and confidence ; such a state of society as good men have ever longed for and dreamt of, but concerning which few have ever been so sanguine as to hope that it could ever be fully realized in this world.

The eternal hymns of praise and the ceaseless round of acts of homage and adoration are figurative too, although we almost forget that they are so, as we learn to realize that all work faithfully done is an act of homage to God, and all true service a living hymn of praise ; and that a constant realization of God's presence is what makes our lives most truly glorious, and fills our souls with most perfect and abiding peace.

The various images and figures under which the nature of the life of Future Blessedness is revealed to us in the New Testament, will probably be all found to fall under

one or other of these three heads—1st, figures of a state of perfect purity of heart and holiness of life; 2nd, figures of a perfect state of society; and 3rdly, figures of a perfect service of God, with a living sense of His presence and power.

When we have thus arrived at what may be called the essence of the New Testament revelation of the future life, we have no difficulty in answering the question as to whether it can be considered as a real and important revelation in the affirmative.

Probably the actual conditions and circumstances of the future life will be such, that it would not be possible to convey to men in the present world any intelligible idea of them, or to describe them at all in human language. At all events, in the absence of any revelation as to those circumstances, we must of necessity express the great ideas revealed to us under figures derived from our present experience; but, nevertheless, we feel that, the essential ideas being given, we have something very real and tangible to go upon, and that the New Testament does indeed reveal much more than the bare generality, that the lot of the righteous shall be a happy one, the fate of the wicked a state full of misery.

A simple illustration may serve to make this somewhat clearer.

Two natives, let us suppose, of some barbarous and distant country—some country whose inhabitants had never come in contact with the people of the civilized world—are shipwrecked on our coasts, and obliged to pass a considerable time in this country before an opportunity presents itself of returning to their native home.

When at length they do return, they are naturally anxious, after the manner of travellers, to relate their various experiences to their fellow-countrymen, and to enlighten them as to all the wonders of the civilized world. One of them, being a man of much power of observation, has gained a great deal of information about the habits of civilized people, and the knowledge and the arts which adorn civilized life. He feels that a description of the life of a wealthy household in Christian England must prove intensely interesting to his barbarian fellow-countrymen. He describes, accordingly, the structure of an English mansion. He pictures the gorgeously furnished rooms, and tells of all the various appliances made use of to increase the comfort and minister to the wants of the inhabitants. He gives much information about the civilized art of cookery and the manner of serving meals. He explains the nature of the occupations and amusements of the people among whom he has resided. But alas! he soon finds that his laudable efforts are all in vain. His hearers stand stupified and bewildered, or perhaps exclaim; "all this is very strange and wonderful: perhaps it has a meaning, and is all true, but we have not the faintest conception of what it is all about."

But now the other traveller comes forward. He is a simple man, by no means the equal of his companion in intelligence, but is yet desirous of giving his modest version of his experiences in his own way:—"All that my brother has told you," he says, "is quite true, strange as it may seem to you; but I am not at all surprised that you find it hard to understand: for indeed

there are many things in the lives of those wonderful people which I myself found utterly bewildering, and I cannot but express my admiration of the way in which he has taken it all in. I, however, after my own simple fashion, have been trying to learn something about these strange people and their ways, and I will now try and give you some idea of what a Christian home is like, as I have found it. A Christian home is a place where people understand and realize better than anywhere else in the world the meaning and the blessedness of those bonds of love and affection by which the members of a family are united to each other, and where, moreover, they have a constant living sense of the presence and protection of a good and loving God. Thus, of necessity, a Christian home is always brightened with the light of love, and is full of perfect joy and peace. There are no petty strifes or jealousies there. No bitter words or taunts break the universal harmony. Each member sympathises fully and entirely with all the others, and seeks to support them in their difficulties, comfort them in their sorrows, and minister to their wants. In a Christian home are found all things that are truly beautiful and graceful, and all high and noble thoughts are cherished there. No one can pass even a single day in such a home without feeling something of its blessedness, and being refreshed with the abundance of its peace."

To this description, given in plain and familiar language, the savages listen with rapturous delight. "Ah! now," they cry, "we understand what a home in a Christian land is like. This man has really given us *the true idea* of it. The other, in spite of all his cleverness, has told us nothing."

The New Testament, then, does contain a real and important revelation of the nature of the future life, a revelation expressed, if we may so say, in terms of our present experience, but for that very reason one which is altogether suited to our capacities.

In the next place, it will be necessary to consider whether we can conceive it possible or likely that this revelation should ever meet with general acceptance; *i.e.* whether men in general may ever be expected to desire sincerely the blessedness of the future world, and if so, what effect that belief will have upon the course of worldly affairs.

In the future life God's will will be perfectly done, God's rule universally acknowledged, God's presence unceasingly realized. Is it likely that men will ever come, as a general rule, to desire that this should come to pass? Perhaps the best answer to this question is, that now, and always, men do, on the whole, desire and labour for the realization of the state of things described.

Whether the majority of men have a living sense of the presence of a personal God or not, at all events, it may be assumed that, in general, they desire—and must desire—that justice and truth should prevail in the world; that they have a sense that it accords with the fitness of things, that righteousness should triumph and wickedness be defeated.

Is not this, so far forth, a desire that God, whose very nature is truth and righteousness should rule in the world, and the expression of a belief that He ought to rule? It is expected that the poet and the writer of fiction shall embody this idea in their work, shall always make the

good and innocent triumph, and mete out due poetic justice to the selfish and the wicked. No feeling, indeed, is more deeply rooted in human nature than that which refuses to acquiesce in the idea of a mere reign of chance in the ordering of the affairs of men.

It is this view which finds expression in the theory adopted by certain philosophers that the history of the world may rightly be considered as having for its highest object the evolution or working out of a Moral Idea.

This evolution of the Moral Idea is evidently the same thing as that operation of the "not-ourselves"—"or the stream of tendencies"—"which makes for righteousness," of which Mr. Matthew Arnold used to speak, and which he considered to be so real and so important a thing. Mr. Matthew Arnold never tires of setting forth the simplicity and definiteness of this idea as contrasted with the metaphysical difficulties involved in the belief in a Personal God; yet notwithstanding all that he says, it is impossible to doubt that the ordinary man of the world will always find it much easier to conceive the idea of a Heavenly Father ordering all things in righteousness and love, than to grasp this vague, impalpable idea, whether expressed in the language of Mr. Matthew Arnold or in the more recondite phraseology of the Hegelian philosophy. Nor is it only the man of the world, or the much-abused bigot of common sense, who will feel the practical necessity of rising from this vague impersonal idea to the belief in a Personal God; but even the profound philosopher must always be haunted by an uneasy suspicion that to speak of a Moral Idea which originates in no mind, which emanates from nobody, and, in fact, does not seem to have any sort of

origin, is to attempt to satisfy oneself with a piece of mere unintelligible jargon.

At all events, whatever explanation may be given of the fact, the feeling that there is and must be a law in the world which makes for righteousness and truth, is deeply rooted in human nature; and so, as we realize how imperfectly that law is fulfilled in the present world, and how slowly the Moral Idea seems to advance towards perfect development, we must rejoice in the promise of a future life in which the working out of that Idea shall be perfected, and our faith in the reign of righteousness shall be fully justified.

Again, the future life will embody the ideal of a perfect state of society, and in it the brotherhood of all men will become a reality. Do men really care for this, or, if they care for it at all, are they likely to desire it more earnestly as time goes on and experience widens? The strain of life, we are told, is now so severe, and competition is so keen in all departments of life, that there is really no room left for the cultivation of that unselfishness, which must necessarily form the basis of the perfect state of society. Every man for himself, must become more and more the great watchword of men as they press forward in the fierce struggle of life. None but the young and inexperienced, and perhaps a few vain and visionary enthusiasts here and there, can now dream of a life of noble unselfishness or of sacrifice for the good of others.

No doubt there is some truth in this. The strain upon our powers in the race of life is now very severe, and the earnestness with which we must struggle in order to hold our own and make our way in the world has a tendency

to make us selfish, hard, and cynical. But, thank God, this is only half the truth. It is surely a very important matter that the young and ingenuous—those whose minds have not yet been warped by the trials and difficulties of the world—naturally love and trust their fellows, desire the True, the Beautiful, and the Good, and shrink with horror from the thought of becoming selfish or world-hardened. But what it is most important to notice is this: that if the life of calculating selfishness were really the natural one for men in the world, no one would ever think it worth while to find fault with the state of things, or to make any of those complaints of the hardness and selfishness of the world with which we are so familiar. The actual state of things would be accepted as a matter of course, and no one would think it necessary to comment upon it in one way or the other.

It is because men feel that they ought to live for one another, and ought to be able to trust each other; because, in spite of the presence of selfishness, and in spite of the keen competition involved in the struggle of life, they really long for a perfect state of society, that they cry out so bitterly against the selfishness and injustice of the world. The popular novelist would never have put into the mouth of one of his most detestable characters the maxim, "Do other men, for they will do you," if he did not know that his readers would regard such a sentiment as utterly abominable—a coarse and unjust libel upon human nature.

In point of fact, it is quite impossible to be absolutely selfish in the pursuit of happiness. With the exception of the lowest of all forms of enjoyment—mere eating and

drinking—there is no pleasure which men can desire, no good thing for which they can strive, which does not require some amount of co-operation with others, and some kind of social union. In almost all forms of enjoyment, the enjoyment of others with ourselves is a necessary element, and the more perfect their enjoyment, the more perfect our own is likely to be.

It appears, therefore, that a perfect state of society, in which men shall live together and work together, in which they shall learn to forget themselves, and let their hearts go out in sympathy and affection to their fellows, is just what men do seek for, and must of necessity seek for in this world.

The sphere of our affections may indeed be very much circumscribed; one may think only of his own family or of his immediate circle of friends and acquaintances; but in so far as he must take account of and work for any others beside himself, he must be learning to desire the perfect social state, while increasing knowledge and wider experience will inevitably tend to enlarge the sphere of his affections.

When we come to consider the third element in the New Testament revelation of a future state—viz. that it will be a state of perfect purity of heart and holiness of life—it is, perhaps, not so easy to speak with confidence; but yet it may be safely assumed that, in the absence of temptation to do wrong, everyone would prefer to do that which is just and righteous, that most men would rather, if they could, be pure and holy in heart, though they are not always willing to face the difficulties or make the sacrifices necessary in order to gain the holiness which they nevertheless appreciate and admire.

But although the idea of a life of perfect purity and holiness may not appeal so powerfully to the feelings and imagination as might be desired, it must, at all events, appeal very strongly to the reason. For, if we feel that the coming of the Kingdom of God—*i.e.* the perfect reign of righteousness and truth—and the realization of a perfect state of society are undoubtedly desirable things, we must acknowledge that we ought to seek that our lives may be such as to fit us to have our part in such a world as we desire. Nothing could be more irrational than to wish that justice and righteousness should universally prevail, and at the same time not to recognize that we ourselves ought to be perfectly just and righteous, or to desire the approbation and confidence of our fellows, and not to seek to make ourselves wholly worthy of that confidence and approbation.

These considerations will enable us to realize, not only that the New Testament affords a revelation about the future life which must, when rightly understood, appeal to the hearts of men, but also that, so far is it from being true that the acceptance of that doctrine must tend to diminish men's interest in the affairs of the world, that it is only through the experience gained by life in the world, and by the faithful discharge of our duties, that that revelation can be brought home to our hearts, or be rightly and fully understood.

For, to whom will the Gospel message of a life of future blessedness come home with living power as God's own message of salvation? Evidently not to the gloomy ascetic who separates himself from his fellows, and passes his life apart from the busy world in solitary contemplation.

In vain will such a one seek to feast his imagination on glorious visions of the eternal world; for to him such visions must of necessity be utterly meaningless and unreal. Not to the morose, unworldly man, who refuses to take any living interest in the affairs of the world, and keeps himself as much as he possibly can from participation in its useful occupations and innocent amusements. Not to these, but to the man who lives in the world, who takes a keen interest in the affairs of his fellow-men, and who uses in the service of men the powers and talents which God has given Him, with earnest desire to do some good in his sphere in life and to be really helpful to those around him.

He who is thus "a man of the world," in the best sense of the word, must learn by his experience of life to long for the perfect state of society and the perfect realization of the reign of righteousness and truth. He will indeed be sadly conscious that what he desires and seeks for is still very far from being attained, that there are still many crooked things to be made straight, many rough places to be made plain.

In the perversion of justice, in the many wrongs and evils prevalent in the world, he will find many things to deplore, some things which will sorely try his Faith, and oppress him with sadness. But when he is most strongly tempted to despair, when he feels most inclined to cry out in bitterness of soul, "Who will show us any good?" he will find all his energies braced up, and all his gloomy thoughts dispelled in the light of the promise that the City which he has learned to seek for shall surely be revealed in God's own good time, and resting on the

faithfulness of that promise, he will be enabled to recognise the many signs and tokens that the Heavenly Kingdom is at hand, and that the world is, indeed, being prepared for the coming of its Lord, which, to him who has eyes to see, are clearly manifested in the life and progress of the world.

It is evident that the earnest longing for a future life, as it is thus revealed in the New Testament, must be entirely free from that taint of other-worldliness with which the belief of Christians has been so often charged. Other-worldliness may be defined as, a form of selfishness which has for its object the gains and satisfactions of the future world. He who separates himself from the world, and occupies himself exclusively with the idea of the salvation of his own soul, will naturally, if he forms any idea of future blessedness, form an essentially selfish idea in which his own individual comfort and gratification will absorb all his thoughts. But such an idea of future blessedness is not, as we have seen, that which is presented to us in the Gospel, not that which is learned by a faithful and earnest man from the experience of a life of service in the world.

When once it is clearly realized that the truest happiness and most perfect satisfaction are to be found in what tends to secure the happiness of others, and in the experience of the reign of righteousness and truth, it becomes evident that a capacity for enjoyment, and a keen delight in good and beautiful things, whether in this world or the next, is not necessarily a mark of selfishness, but that the truest enjoyment of which men are capable involves, of necessity, the most complete unselfishness.

In fact, so far is it from being the case that there is anything ignoble or reprehensible in a capacity for happiness and enjoyment, that, on the contrary, we cannot but feel that there is something radically wrong and deserving of blame—something of the nature of ingratitude—in a gloomy and morose disposition which is incapable of taking any delight in the works and gifts of God.

These considerations will enable us to estimate the value of the assertion, which has been so often made, that the Christian belief in a future life involves a refined form of selfishness, and contrasts unfavourably in this respect with that of the Positivist, which bids men sacrifice their happiness cheerfully without hope of compensation, and endure the trials of a sorrowful life without complaining, for the sake of the happiness of posterity. The Positivist seeks for the realization of a perfect state of society, and for a reign of righteousness and truth. So far, his ideal is the same with that of the Christian. But it cannot be said that "he seeks for the City which has the foundations,"[1] or for "the Kingdom which cannot be removed,"[2] inasmuch as his ideal is one to be realized only in this passing world, and the state of perfect happiness for which he longs will only be enjoyed by any generation of men during the brief span of earthly existence.

There can be little doubt as to which of these two ideals is best adapted to appeal to the great majority of human beings; the only question on which any doubt can arise is whether the Positivist ideal is or is not essentially higher and nobler than that of the Christian.

[1] Heb. xi. 10. [2] Heb. xii. 28.

It may, perhaps, be a sign of the greatest possible nobility of character to give up one's own happiness cheerfully for the sake of others without hope of reward or compensation. But since the object to be gained by such sacrifice is *ex hypothesi* happiness—the happiness of others—and the great end to the attainment of which all such self-sacrifice is directed is the greatest possible happiness of mankind in general, the strange conclusion seems to follow that, when our posterity shall have reached the ideal state, the highest form of virtue must cease to be practised, and the greatest nobility of which human character is capable can no longer be developed.

We cannot but feel that there must be some radical error in a theory which leads to so absurd a conclusion; and, indeed, when all confusion of thought is cleared away, we have no difficulty in recognising that the Christian theory contains all that is really valuable in Posivitism, without leading to any absurd or untenable conclusion.

In the first place it is evident that we admire and appreciate self-denial, just as we admire the performance of any difficult work, and especially any difficult work which tends to some end of practical utility.

It is hard to endure pain and suffering—hard to give up what we desire and may obtain. It is very hard, even when we are supported by the hope of some ultimate advantage to be gained. The present is always so real, the future so dim and uncertain, that it must always be hard for human beings to forego the good which may be enjoyed in the present, or to suffer pain for the sake of some future gratification. Pain is no less pain, no less a thing from which human nature shrinks, because it is

expected that the present pain is likely to produce a future benefit.

The difficulty of self-sacrifice, therefore, constitutes one important factor of its nobility. But it is only when it involves unselfishness—when in giving up our own pleasure we think chiefly of the good to be done to others, and forget ourselves in our care for our fellows—that self-sacrifice becomes truly noble in the highest sense of the word. It is needless to say that this giving up of one's own pleasure, and willing submission to what is painful and unpleasant for the sake of others, is the very essence of the Christian doctrine of self-sacrifice.

To give up one's own pleasure, and, if necessary, to give up life itself, in order that others may be blessed, is the first lesson of The Cross, and he who has not learned this lesson is no true follower of Christ. Nor has the Christian any reason to think that a time will ever come in this world when it will be no longer necessary to practise this virtue of self-denial, for he does not expect that perfect and universal happiness will ever be attained in this earthly life.

He looks forward indeed to a time when, in the Heavenly Kingdom, there will no longer be any need to endure suffering or practise self-denial, but, on the Christian theory, those who will enjoy the blessedness of that perfect life will be those whose characters have been already perfected through the trials and sufferings of earthly life; "who have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb,"[1] and not some new

[1] Rev. vii. 14.

race brought into existence in a state of society in which there is no longer any opportunity for the cultivation of virtue, and the development of a noble character.

It is impossible to believe that any considerable number of human beings will ever consent to lead lives of self-denial, with no hope of happiness for themselves to brighten their cheerless lot, in order that generations yet unborn may have a thoroughly comfortable existence during the short space of man's life on earth; but it is conceivable that men may learn more and more to live and labour—aye, and to suffer—for others, and cheerfully to endure the trials of a sorrowful life for the sake of an eternal life of blessedness for all mankind, in which a perfect state of society shall be realized, and righteousness and truth shall have supreme and abiding sway. Nor will their lives be less noble because they know, and rejoice to know, that they themselves shall have their part in the universal happiness; that they "shall see of the travail of their souls and be satisfied."[1]

It must, however, be borne in mind, that it is because we learn from our present experience that earnest work and self-denial, if rightly directed, do really tend to promote the happiness and well-being of our fellows that we are enabled to look forward to a happy and perfect issue of all our labours and sacrifices in a future life. If we were to adopt the conclusions of Pessimism, were seriously convinced that the balance of life in this world must always, of necessity, incline to the side of misery, it may reasonably be doubted whether we could have any

[1] Isaiah liii. 11.

living faith in a future life of blessedness, or could conceive the possibility of a life of happiness.

If the only life of which we have any experience were, on the whole, hopelessly miserable, we should probably be in the state of mind of a very poor and unfortunate old man who once walked out of church in the middle of a sermon about Heaven, protesting audibly that he would never assent to that doctrine, because, having had experience of one life, he was firmly convinced it was as much as anyone could possibly bear. Men do not, on the whole, justify their continuance in existence to themselves, on the ground that they were sent into this world—a world of prevailing and preponderating misery—to enable them to prepare for a better and happier world.

It is because there is so much real happiness here—happiness which is most fully enjoyed in a life of earnestness and devotion; because we feel that we were made for happiness, made to rejoice in God, and find in Him perfect and abiding blessedness; because we feel convinced that the misery and wrong that are in the world are somehow a perversion of the intended order of things, and that happiness really tends to predominate in the world: that we are enabled to look forward with assured trust and confidence to the coming of a state of perfect blessedness.

Thus good and true men must ever long and hope for the future life of blessedness, even when they throw themselves with keenest interest and most intense earnestness into the busy whirl of earthly life, not because they think of the present life as hopelessly and unbearably evil, and long to flee away and be at rest, but because,

in earnestly and faithfully playing their part in the life of the present, they learn to desire and hope for certain results which can only be perfectly attained in the future life.

Our firm belief in the life to come will, no doubt, have an important bearing on our views of the duties and pleasures of the present world; but surely, the influence exercised by that belief will be wholly an influence for good. For that belief will not make us less earnest in the discharge of duties, or less keenly interested in whatever tends to the welfare of mankind. It will not hinder us from receiving with joy and thankfulness whatever good things are given us to enjoy by our Heavenly Father.

But, on the other hand, this belief will surely tend to banish from our minds the anxious care and harassing anxiety about the earthly future which oppress and darken the life of the *mere* man of the world, while it will teach us to set less value on mere worldly gains and advantages. Worldly gains, worldly successes, high position, power: these things are all good in their way but, after all, they are only the perishable things of earth. We may enjoy them when they come in our way; but their loss should not affect us much; for it is not on on such things that we should set the affections of our hearts. "We look, not at the things which are seen, which are temporal, but at the things which are not seen, which are eternal."[1]

Justice, purity of heart, holiness, love: these things

[1] 2 Cor. iv. 18.

are indeed manifested upon earth; but they belong to eternity. While we cherish these things in our own hearts, and work with earnestness for their spread in the world, we shall ever feel more and more truly, ever more and more deeply, that "though here have we no continuing city, yet we are, in deed and in truth, seeking that City which is to come—the City which hath *the* foundations, whose builder and maker is God."

LECTURE III.

THE SAVIOUR OF THE WORLD.

St. John, viii. 12.

"I am the Light of the World."

IT is not by any means an easy task to determine how far, and in what respects, the condition of the world and the progress of civilization have been affected by the religion of Christ.

What has Christianity done to raise the general standard of life and conduct? To what extent has it been successful in making the majority of professing Christians juster, truer, holier, than they would otherwise have been? In what respects has it changed or modified our views of life and duty? And, lastly, how far has it tended to increase or diminish the happiness of mankind? These are questions which we cannot help asking; they are questions of the deepest interest to every student of history, or of human nature.

The Christian who believes that his Lord came to be indeed the Light of the World, and to bring a blessing to all mankind, must feel that he cannot and ought not

to put such questions aside, and refuse to consider them, and that it ought to be possible to give satisfactory answers to them all.

But when we come to consider carefully the matters with which we have to deal in attempting to answer such questions, we cannot fail to realize that the extent of ground to be traversed is so vast, so many circumstances have to be taken into account, and the problems which present themselves are in their own nature so complicated and difficult, that we might well despair of being able to pursue our inquiries with any prospect of success.

It is natural that we should desire to know how far Christianity has been successful in making men, in general, better, holier, purer in heart, more earnest and faithful in their lives, than they were before it came into the world. But, how are we to set about the task of gaining the required information; or, whence shall we collect the materials necessary in order to arrive at a trustworthy conclusion? It is scarcely necessary to say that exact calculations founded on accurate statistics are entirely out of the question. We cannot count up, first all the good men, and then all the bad men, in the community, and so determine exactly the ratio of the number of good men to the total population of the Christian world.

Still less is it possible for us to make such a calculation for any former age with which we may desire to compare our own. Even if we could perform such a feat as this with any approximation to accuracy, we should still feel that our calculations would be worthless, unless we could determine, not merely the quantity of the goodness in

each case, but also its quality, so that we might be able to compare the moral worth of a certain number of nineteenth-century Christians with that of the same number of average members of society in some pre-Christian age :—say, *e.g.*, with that of the same number of civilized Greeks in the second or third century, B.C.

But even if we attempt what may seem much simpler and more practicable, and try to compare the general standard of life and conduct prevailing in our day with that which was generally accepted in some earlier period, it is evident that so many things have to be taken into consideration, and such serious difficulties must be faced, that very great caution is necessary at every step, if our conclusions are to have any real value.

It is very difficult to look at our own age as if we were mere outsiders and onlookers, and to form an unbiassed and impartial judgment about the lives and characters of the people whom we see around us. It is harder still for us to enter thoroughly into the spirit of any period far removed from our own time, to understand how people in such a period felt and thought, or to have any just idea of the difficulties and trials which they had to face, or of the spirit which animated them in their life's conflict. These and similar difficulties must always attend any attempt to deal with such questions as those which have been suggested ; and, therefore, although to a certain extent it is possible to compare one age or one period of history with another with respect to the state of civilization, the average morality, or the general prevalence of happiness and comfort ; yet, it is evident that in all such inquiries, not only careful study, and

accurate knowledge, but also the very greatest caution and patience are necessary if the conclusions arrived at are to have any real value.

Fortunately for us, however, it is not necessary to await the result of such complicated and difficult investigations in order to bring the claim of Christianity to be the Divinely appointed means for the regeneration and restoration of mankind to the test of practical experience.

From the difficulties which perplex and bewilder us when we endeavour to discuss with calmness and sincerity the question whether the Christianity of modern society may, or may not, be fairly described as a cultured heathenism, how gladly do we turn to dwell upon the picture of the saintly and Christ-like life, as we have seen it realized in some devoted servant of God, in whose presence we have felt that it was impossible to doubt for one moment the divine power and reality of the religion of Christ.

We can think of the man of God—earnest, faithful, zealously devoted to every good work, quiet and unostentatious in manner, simple and sincere in life and conversation, pure and true in thought, and word, and deed, full of the spirit of love and gentleness, living in constant communion with God, and constant realization of the divine presence—in one word—manifesting in a high degree of perfection the very highest and most perfect type of character of which we can form any conception—the type of the truly Christ-like life.

Thank God: this is no mere fancy picture. We must all of us have known many men and women whose lives

exhibited in a greater or less degree this peculiar type of character, and who approached more or less nearly to its perfect realization; and our experience must have been indeed very limited, if we have not come across, at least, a few in whom the Christ-like character has been developed to a very high degree of perfection. When we try to analyse and understand this saintly type of character, we cannot help feeling convinced that, for its cultivation and development, something is required beyond and above the ordinary forces inherent in human nature, and that it bears infallible testimony to the reality of the divine life and the supernatural birth from above.

Looking back over the whole course of the history of the Christian Church, we realize the fact that this saintly type of character has been produced in every period; and that from age to age Christ has been manifested, not merely in the written records of the Gospels, but also in those "living Epistles known and read of all men"—the lives of devoted men and women who have given their lives to His service.

The events recorded in history must, of necessity, be the great events in the lives of men and nations—the events in which great men have to play trying and difficult parts, in which human passions are stirred to their depths, and in which the fierce light of publicity is sure to bring out with awful distinctness every human weakness and imperfection. It is not in the records of such events that the power and gentle beauty of the Christ-like life are likely to shine forth in their brightest radiance. Rather is it to be expected that in such records the awful reality and baleful power of the evil which

must ever be mingled with the good in the Church of Christ should be most clearly manifested. And yet, when we think of the many martyrs who have suffered and died for sake of the truth, when we think of the devoted missionaries who have given their lives to the work of spreading the light of the Gospel in the dark places of the earth: when we think what a long list of true saints—of men and women who have done noble deeds, and lived noble lives—might be made out even amongst the number of those who have been concerned in great events, and have made for themselves a lasting mark in the world's history; we cannot but feel that although there are undoubtedly many dark and sin-stained pages in the history of the Church of Christ; although many things have been done in the name of Christ which make our hearts burn with shame and indignation; yet that when we look at the picture as a whole, as we surely ought to do, we have no reason to be ashamed of it, but may unhesitatingly reject as a gross exaggeration and unmerited calumny the well-known description of Church history as "a long catalogue of crimes and follies redeemed by some virtues."

But it is only when the great truth comes home to our minds that the comparatively few whose names are recorded in history are only representatives of the many who, in every age, have sought to follow Christ and to glorify God according to their light and the opportunities afforded them, that we begin to have any just and adequate conception of the real greatness of the power for good which the Gospel of Christ has exercised in this world of ours. Then, indeed, a glorious vision is revealed to us:

we seem to see an exceeding great army of men and women, belonging indeed to many different ages and to many different races, of every rank and station in life, and presenting many varieties of character, culture, and disposition ; yet all wonderfully alike in spite of all these differences, for all bear the stamp and impress of one divine and heavenly character, all are moulded in the image and likeness of Christ. As they pass us by we hear them joining together in one glorious hymn of praise, as with one voice they proclaim the power of Christ to purify the heart, to give strength to the weak, to enable men to overcome sin and temptation, and to bring joy and abiding peace to the weary and sorrow-laden. As we seek to lay to heart the meaning of the vision, another voice is heard—an old familiar word comes home once again to our souls with new depth of meaning, as it seems to be spoken to our inmost hearts in words of divine power. "Go," meditate "upon the things which ye have seen and heard : how the blind receive their sight ; the lame walk ; the lepers are cleansed ; the deaf hear ; the dead are raised up ; the poor have good tidings preached unto them. And blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in me."[1]

It must be remembered that the saintly character has been manifested under very different forms in different ages. This, of course, is what might have been expected beforehand, and the fact that it has been so ought not, therefore, to cause us any surprise. If, on the one hand, the saint—in so far as he is a saint—belongs to the Eternal

[1] St. Luke, vii. 22, 23.

World, or, if we choose to call it so, the Kingdom of Heaven, on the other hand, it must be remembered that his life has an earthly side, and that with respect to this, he must of necessity be a son of his own time. It is important that we should take special note of this fact; for this reason, that when we find in the characters of good men of former days certain peculiarities, which were the natural result of their environment, but which are not in harmony with the feelings and ideas of our own day—when, for example, we find such men very superstitious, very narrow, or very fanatical—we sometimes find it hard to do full justice to the elements of real goodness which were, after all, the most strongly-marked features in their characters, or to recognise, as we ought to do, the permanent and unchanging features of the Christ-like life under that outer crust of folly, superstition, or fanaticism which disgusts and repels us.

There is another fact connected with what we have called the two-fold aspect of the saintly life which it is most important to remember, and which has a more direct bearing upon the main subject of the present inquiry.

It is very natural that we should contrast the life of the spiritual man—calm, gentle, peaceful, passed in constant realization of the Divine Presence—with the busy, bustling life of the man of the world, which is so full of conflict and tumult, so much occupied with distracting cares and harassing anxieties, so eager, so restless.

It is just as natural that we should jump hastily to the conclusion that things which are contrasted in thought must, of necessity, be distinct and separate in reality. And so, we come to think of the great world as a sphere apart

from, and even opposed to, the Kingdom of God, and as going along in its own ungodly way wholly uninfluenced by the power of that Gospel of Christ, which rules in its own dominion with gentle sway the hearts and lives of those who submit to its control, and who pass as pilgrims and strangers through a world with which they have absolutely no concern.

A very little reflection will, however, serve to convince us that this view is radically false. The lives of holy men and women must, after all, be passed in this world. They cannot avoid taking part, to some extent, in its affairs, and having some intercourse with their fellows. And thus, of necessity, their lives must be in vital connexion with the life of society as a whole, and must exercise a certain amount of influence upon the general standard of conduct and the general tone of society.

As long, therefore, as human nature continues to be what it is: as long as it is impossible for men not to be influenced by the lives and example of their fellows: as long as the human heart must be stirred to its depths by the power of noble words and noble deeds: so long must the holy and faithful lives of Christ-like men and women continue to exert a widespread influence for good throughout the whole society in which they move—an influence which must, of necessity, tend to raise the generally accepted standard of character and conduct, and to make the world, as a whole, more truly and perfectly the Kingdom of God upon Earth.

If, on the one hand, we meet with many whom we do not hesitate to speak of as truly Christ-like and saintly men and women, on the other hand, alas! we come in

contact with many whom no stretch of Christian charity will permit us to class as anything but hardened and abandoned sinners. But the mass of mankind is not made up entirely of the eminently saintly and the utterly abandoned. On the contrary, the great majority has always been, and will always be, made up of those who are neither the one nor the other, but ordinary every-day people of many varying types of character, liable to fall under the pressure of temptation, often very weak and imperfect, often having very inadequate, and even erroneous, views of duty and conduct, but yet not devoid of noble impulses, not incapable of rising to higher and better things. It is these ordinary average people who give its tone to the society to which they belong, and whose lives and aims form the ordinary worldly standard of character and conduct.

But now, since the lives of the best men and women must, of necessity, be a great moral force influencing this average standard of character and conduct, and tending to make it ever higher and more perfect, and since it must be acknowledged that the religion of Christ has been the source of all that has been highest and holiest in the modern period—the ever-living fountain from which righteousness and love have never ceased to flow down in fertilizing streams—we are forced to conclude that, to suppose that the tone of society and the general standard of life and conduct have not been profoundly influenced for the better by Christianity, must, of necessity, be utterly erroneous.

It is undoubtedly true that average men of the world often manifest great dislike towards those who endeavour

to regulate their lives by a higher and more unworldly standard ; but, when we come to think of it, does not this show conclusively that the power of the higher life to influence the average man of the world for his good is a very real thing?

What do the dislike and opposition which a truly Christ-like man experiences in this way show, but that the average man has been rudely disturbed while pursuing peaceably the even tenor of his way, that he has been made dissatisfied with himself, and that, as a necessary consequence, he chafes and struggles against that which rouses him in spite of himself, and forces him to seek for something higher and better than he has hitherto thought of?

The earlier Pagan persecutions directed against the Church were, for the most part, undoubtedly due to outbursts of popular rage—the rage of the ordinary average people of the world—against the disciples of Christ, and even in those which, like the Decian and Diocletian persecutions, originated in a settled and deliberate policy on the part of the rulers, it is certain that the sufferings of the Christians were, in many places, aggravated and intensified by the same popular ill-feeling. It has often been said that those persecutions served the cause of Christianity, that "the blood of the martyrs has ever been the seed of the Church." This is, perhaps, true to a certain extent. But when we consider that the rapid spread of the Gospel, together with the peculiar lives lived by Christians in the midst of that corrupt society, were the causes which drew public attention to the disciples of Christ, and stirred up ill-feeling against them, we cannot but think that it is

nearer the truth to say, that the blood of the martyrs was the sign that the heavenly seed was taking deep root in the world, and that the persecutions were the effort of a world sunk in vice and godlessness to shake off the mighty power which was stirring it to its depths, raising it in its own despite from its death-like sleep, and bearing it onward in the way of life and progress.

In a certain sense, then, it is true that Christianity is not a religion suited to the average man, inasmuch as it refuses to allow him to rest satisfied and content with "the things whereto he has already attained," but incessantly urges him forward, and forces him to aim continually at things higher and better. At the same time it would be utterly false and unjust to refuse to recognise the average man as having any claim to be considered as a Christian, or to assert that Christianity has never had, and never can have, any real influence upon society as a whole.

It may, perhaps, be objected that, as a matter of fact, when we consider seriously the state of things in the Christian world at the present day, we cannot but feel that there has not been any such change for the better as might have been expected after nineteen centuries of Christian work and Christian teaching; but that, when we frankly face the broad facts, and, on the one hand, look at the present state of society, taking account of the many evils to which we cannot be blind, while, on the other hand, we consider what men were able to attain to without the help of Christianity in those ages of Pagan antiquity with which we are best acquainted, we cannot help feeling that the conclusions which we are forced to draw are very far from being satisfactory.

When, however, we attempt to institute comparisons of this sort between ancient and modern times, or between any two different periods, we must never forget that advancing civilization, in so far as the advance of civilization means increase of knowledge, of culture, and of wealth, does not, in itself, tend to moral improvement, but, on the contrary, brings with it in its train a host of new and formerly unknown evils and temptations. With the advance of knowledge, old ideas and old associations lose their hold upon the minds of men, while various and attractive forms of vice become familiar to them.

The increase of wealth and luxury naturally tends to render men slothful and effeminate; while the greater complexity of social life, and the more unequal distribution of wealth which must always accompany such progress, have a strong tendency to stir up social strife and class jealousies, and to produce an eager and excessive striving after riches and social position.

Thus, while old views of life and duty lose their power, and cease to have any effect upon character and conduct, a host of new influences, all tending to evil, grow up with the advance of civilization.

If, therefore, speaking generally, we could only claim that the average standard of character and conduct is as high now as it ever was—and this will hardly be denied by any candid and competent judge—we should have decisive testimony to the value of the service which Christianity has rendered to the world in restraining the growth of vice, and providing a remedy sufficient to counteract the many evils attendant upon the advance of civilization.

We may find much to admire in the civilization of ancient Greece and Rome in their palmiest days. The typical Roman citizen of early republican days was a man animated by a lofty and disinterested patriotism. He had a high ideal of truth, good faith, and justice. He valued and cherished the sanctity and purity of domestic life. At the same time it must not be forgotten that his views of life and duty were narrow and exclusive, that his character was excessively harsh and stern, and did not give sufficient scope for the exercise of the softer and gentler virtues such as kindliness and compassion; nay, that it was not without a certain element of that brutality which makes a man utterly indifferent to the sufferings of others.

It is harder for us to form a just estimate of the character of the ancient Greeks at their best, than of that of the ancient Romans. Naturally attracted by the bright and fascinating qualities—the love of nature, the keen delight in all kinds of beauty, moral as well as natural, the quick intelligence, the enthusiasm for everything great and noble—so characteristic of the ancient Greek, we are inclined to leave out of sight the darker side of the picture, and to forget the inconstancy and fickleness, the excessive vanity and the insincerity which were such clearly-marked features of the national character. When we remember the indifference and contempt with which the Greeks treated the members of inferior races, we may reasonably doubt whether they were a whit less exclusive and narrow in their ideas than the Romans, although they were undoubtedly superior to the latter in the cultivation of the virtues of kindliness, benevolence, and humanity, and probably quite their

equals in the virtue of patriotism. The Greek ideal of purity was lower than that of the Romans, and it is scarcely necessary to point out how very far it falls below the Christian standard. Under the influence of Christian teaching we have learned to appreciate the beauty and blessedness of certain kinds of self-denial, which would have been quite unintelligible to an ancient Hellene; consequently, things which would have seemed to him harmless and natural, or at the worst very trifling and pardonable excesses, are recognised by us as utterly hateful and degrading.

When we place the Christian ideal of life and character, which has now become the generally received and approved standard of society in the civilized world, side by side with the imperfect views of duty and righteousness which prevailed in the old world, we cannot fail to realize that the religion of Christ has indeed done a great work, a work of far-reaching importance, for the development and improvement of human character; and that, consequently, nothing could be farther from the truth than the assertion that Christianity has only modified and influenced the outside of things, the mere external condition of the world, but has failed to touch the inner springs of human life and character in general.[1]

[1] It may be objected that there is a great difference between a *generally received standard of character*, and *the general average of character*, at any given period: that the one is merely an ideal, the other something actually realized; that while the accepted standard of character may be raised, the actual state of things may remain unchanged, or may even change for the worse.

To anyone who considers the matter carefully, however, it must be evident, that although the generally received standard of character

Consciously or unconsciously, *we* must accept the Christian standard and form our judgments of men's conduct in accordance with its principles. Our idea of what a good man ought to be—of what we ought to be ourselves—must of necessity embrace: "Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honourable, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are loveable, whatsover things are of good report; if there be any virtue, or any praiseworthy thing,"[1] it must be included and embraced in due proportion and perfect harmony in this divinely perfect ideal.

Since this is so, the Christian need never fear the

is an ideal, which may be very imperfectly realized, yet, nevertheless, it does not exist merely as an ideal, wholly apart from the actual life of men; but that the standard which men generally adopt must depend upon their state of civilization, culture, and general morality, while, as something kept constantly before men's minds, as something affecting their judgments about human conduct, it must, in turn, exercise a considerable influence upon their lives. "We needs must love the highest when we see it." The Christian ideal may be something perfect given to us from without; but the proof that it has been an actual power for good is that it has come to be so well understood and to be so generally accepted.

That the Christian ideal has worked its way into the minds of men, that it has become not a formula in a book, but a living thought; that we have learned to understand and delight in its beauty and perfection: this is a true measure, and it is the only possible measure of the success of Christianity in the moral and spiritual improvement of man and society.

It may, therefore, be said without hesitation, that it is impossible that while the received standard improves, the actual state of morality should remain stationary, much less that it should degenerate.

[1] Phil. iv. 8.

result of any attempt to estimate the success of the Gospel by a comparison of what it has effected in the sphere of human character with what had been accomplished in earlier periods, apart from its influence.

But even if it were not so; even if it were true that men in general lived nobler lives and followed a higher ideal in ancient Greece and Rome than they do in this nineteenth century of the Christian era, it is worth while to remember, that the fact would, after all, be of little practical importance.

We could not, even if we would, restore the ancient paganism, or, with our wider experience and deeper views, go back to the simpler thoughts and ideas of the world's childhood. We could not breathe new life and vigour into the principles of duty and views of life which served the Greeks and Romans in their best days, while any attempt to invent a revived and improved paganism adapted to the wants and ideas of the nineteenth century would most certainly be as complete and deplorable a failure as the unhappy and ill-fated attempt of the Emperor Julian.

> "Dark the shrine, and dumb the fount of song thence welling,
> Save for words more sad than tears of blood which come,
> Tell the king, on earth has fallen the glorious dwelling,
> And the water-springs that spake are quenched and dumb.
> Not a cell is left the God; no roof; no cover;
> In the hand the prophet—laurel flowers no more."[1]

But in truth the palmy days of both Greece and Rome, the days of freedom, and of the love of freedom; the days

[1] "The Last Oracle"—Swinburne, "Poems and Ballads." 2nd Series.

of noble thoughts and noble deeds, of exalted patriotism and high views of duty, had already passed away when Christianity made its appearance among men; and all over the civilized world of the Roman Empire many unmistakable signs showed that an age of degeneration and decay had set in.

"It has been common," writes the late Dr. Edwin Hatch, "to construct pictures of the state of morals in the first centuries of the Christian era from the statements of satirists who, like all satirists, had a large element of caricature, and from the denunciations of Christian apologists, which, like all denunciations, have a large element of exaggeration. . . . The pictures so constructed are mosaics of singular vices. . . . It is no doubt difficult to gauge the average morality of any age. It is questionable whether the average morality of civilized ages has largely varied. It is probable that, if the satirists of our own day were equally outspoken, the vices of ancient Rome might be found to have a parallel in modern London; and it is probable, not on merely *a priori* grounds, but from the nature of the evidence that remains, that there was in ancient Rome, as there is in modern London, a preponderating mass of those who loved their children and their homes, who were good neighbours and faithful friends, who conscientiously discharged their duties and were, in all current senses of the word, moral men. . . . It will be found on examination that the age in which Christianity grew was in reality an age of moral reformation." [1]

There is so much evidence of different kinds, chiefly what

[1] Hatch, "Hibbert Lectures." Lect. vi., p. 139.

may be gathered from incidental notices in the writings of those who were neither satirists or apologists, so much, even when all due allowances have been made, in the writings of the heathen satirists and Christian apologists, to prove the gross and universal corruption of society in the Roman Empire in the earliest centuries of the Christian era, so much to show that gross vices were indulged in with an openness and shamelessness that assuredly have no parallel in modern London; that it is impossible not to feel that this statement of Dr. Hatch, like most attempts to whitewash notoriously and scandalously evil things, contains "a certain element of exaggeration," and even "of caricature."

What is of primary importance to us at present, however, is the admitted fact that the age in which Christianity appeared was an age of moral reformation. An age of reformation must mean an age in which it is felt that things have gone to the bad, and that there is urgent need for speedy improvement. It suggests to us the idea of a time when influences which had long worked for good have lost their power, and ceased to operate, and when something is needed to check the growth of evils which threaten to destroy society.

The period at which Christianity first appeared was indeed a period of advanced civilization, but with the advance of civilization and the increased intercourse between people of different countries, it is abundantly evident that all those evils which have been already noticed as following in the wake of advancing civilization had begun to assume very formidable proportions.

The old simple views of duty had lost their hold on the

minds of men. With the increase of luxury there was an undoubted increase of vice, while among the mass of the people, the pressure of poverty was, perhaps, more painfully felt than at any former period.

The renewed interest taken in moral philosophy, and especially the remarkable revival of Stoicism in the first and second centuries of our era, the enthusiastic devotion to various forms of Egyptian and Oriental superstition which was so widely prevalent in the Roman Empire about the same time, the rise and progress of that strange mixture of religion and metaphysical speculation which we call Neo-Platonism, and which became so popular in the third century ; all bear witness that men felt deeply that the old principles, whether of religion or morals, which had guided and supported their fathers in earlier days, had no longer any living power, and that there was an universal and heartfelt longing for something which should supply the vacant place—all show clearly the restlessness and anxiety with which men looked forward to the future of society.

From the various ways in which men sought the satisfaction of their spiritual wants, it is evident that a widespread conviction was entertained, although, perhaps, it was not definitely formulated, that salvation for the world could only be found in something which should partake of the nature both of religion and philosophy, satisfying the longings of man's spiritual nature by bringing him once more into communion with the unseen world, while at the same time it should serve as a rule of duty and guide of conduct; and so serve to meet the requirements of practical life. It is deserving of notice,

that it was the revived Stoicism of the Roman Empire which most fully combined these elements of philosophy and religion, and which in the writings of its three greatest teachers, Seneca, Epictetus, and the Emperor Marcus Aurelius assumed a more deeply spiritual and definitely religious tone than any other form of ancient philosophy, which attained the greatest popularity at this period amongst earnest and thoughtful men.[1]

But, after all, the popularity of Stoicism was but short-lived. Its last great disciple, perhaps the noblest and best of all its disciples, was the Emperor Marcus Aurelius; but even while the great Stoic still sat upon the throne, the power and influence of Stoicism were already on the wane, and before another generation had passed away it had ceased to be of any importance in the world, or to exercise any practical influence on the course of human thought.

The wild and fanciful superstitions of the East, the Persian magic, the mystic Nature-worship of the Egyptians; the rapt ecstasies and strange speculations of the

[1] The original Platonism, was of course deeply spiritual, and has often been described as an essentially religious philosophy. The spirituality of Platonism was, however, chiefly speculative. It was not a practical religious system in the same sense as the later Stoicism, but was a spiritual, rather than a religious philosophy. It must also be noticed, that the later Stoicism contained many important elements derived from Platonism. Neo-Platonism, though deriving some ideas and a considerable part of its terminology from Plato, was in the main a product of Oriental superstition and mysticism—the heathen counterpart of the heretical Christian Gnosticism and of modern Theosophy. For an interesting account of Stoicism, see a Dissertation in Sir Alex. Grant's "Ethics of Aristotle," Vol. i., and in the appendix to Bishop Lightfoot's "Commentary on the Epistle to the Colossians."

Neo-Platonists, although cultivated for a time with eagerness and enthusiam by large numbers of zealous votaries, soon sank into well-merited oblivion. In none of these things could men find abiding rest for their souls, or true satisfaction for the deeper needs of the spiritual nature.

But meanwhile during all that time of anxiety and unrest the Gospel of Jesus Christ was slowly, but steadily, working its way upwards, and extending its sway ever more and more widely throughout the world, leavening the corrupt mass, restraining the growth of vice, and proclaiming itself as the only satisfactory solution of the problems by which the minds of earnest men were sorely exercised.

In the person of the Incarnate Son of God, the reality of the Divine Life was manifested to men in the form in which it could be most easily and most fully realized, while God Himself was brought very near to man. Thus the most urgent need of man's spiritual nature was fully satisfied, and a real and living communion with the unseen world restored.

The teaching of the Stoics must have revealed to the world that nothing but a high and perfect ideal of character could ever satisfy the requirements of man's moral nature—that men could never rest satisfied with anything short of perfection. In this respect the teaching of Stoicism and of Christianity were in perfect harmony. But there was one fatal and radical defect in Stoicism which must ever have made it impossible for it to serve as a guide to mankind in practical life. It set a high ideal of virtue, a lofty and inexorable law of conduct before

weak, imperfect, and sin-stained men and women, but it had no help and no remedy for the despair into which such men could not but be driven by the sense of the utter impossibility of attaining that highest perfection which they were forced to desire and aim at. Stoicism had no comfort for those crushed down by the sense of failure; no ground of hope for those burdened by the sense of sin.

Here Christianity came in, and while presenting an ideal of human character more perfect and complete than that of the Stoics, yet, by the doctrine of the Forgiveness of Sins, made it possible for men to maintain the sense of communion with God, and to continue to strive, with renewed hope and confidence, for a life of perfect holiness in spite of failure and of sin.

Thus it appears that these two central doctrines of the Christian Faith, the Incarnation and the Forgiveness of Sins, although they are undoubtedly beset by serious difficulties[1] which have often sorely troubled thoughtful and earnest minds, are yet proved, by what Matthew Arnold would call an experimental proof, since it appears that the world cannot really do without them, and that they afford the only satisfactory solution of a problem relating to practical life, for which some solution is absolutely indispensable.

Assuredly, then, we may conclude that it was because the religion of Christ was in the truest sense divine—God's own answer to the cry of His despairing children; His provision for the satisfaction of their deepest needs—that it continued to grow and spread in the world, and

[1] See Note at end of Lecture, p. 122.

take an ever firmer hold on the affection of men, until it attained that position of pre-eminence and power as the established and dominant religion of the whole empire, which it reached in the fourth century, and which enabled it to survive, with unimpaired vigour, the fall of the Western Empire, and the consequent breaking up of the old civilization, and to enter, with energy, upon the new task imposed on it of moulding, guiding, and civilizing the tribes of barbarians who had overrun the fairest provinces of Europe. For we must not forget how great a break the barbarian invasions of the fifth and following centuries made in the continuity of the history of Europe, and that it is not quite fair, when considering the power for good exercised by Christianity in the world, to treat the whole nineteen centuries as if they formed one unbroken period of uniform and continuous progress.

In order to form a just judgment, we must consider separately the two periods, viz., first, the period of the earliest triumphs of Christianity in the Roman Empire; and, secondly, the period of the formation and growth of the modern European nations from the fifth century to our own day.

The conditions with which Christianity had to deal, and the difficulties which it had to face, have been very different in each of these periods, and the fact that under so many varieties of time and circumstances, the Gospel has continued to maintain its hold upon the hearts of men, and has been able to satisfy the wants of the spiritual nature, is the most convincing proof that it is indeed the divine and catholic religion—"the power of God for salvation." For, during all the centuries, while so many

things have changed, Christianity abides the same. The Church of Christ has not grown old, or lost her power to save the soul and bring joy and peace to the hearts of men. Proudly she stands in unchanging majesty, calm and beautiful, amidst all the tumults and strifes, and all the changes and revolutions of the world. When we turn, as men did in old time, and as men do still—now to some system of philosophy, now to some scheme of culture, now to some new-fashioned substitute for religion, for the satisfaction of the longings and needs of the spiritual nature, do we not hear the voice of one who still speaks to us in loving tones, and says to us to-day, as He said to the wanderer of old, as He said to the restless and anxious men of the degenerate Roman Empire, words which have ever been proved true through all those long centuries which have elapsed? "Whoso drinketh of this water shall thirst again; but whoso drinketh of the water that I shall give shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of living water springing up unto eternal life."[1]

[1] S. John, iv. 13.

Note to Page 119.

The Forgiveness of Sins.

The objections which have been made to the Christian doctrine of Forgiveness of Sins, may be divided into two classes: namely, first, those which have their origin in a sense of difficulties inherent in the nature of things; and second, those which spring from a consideration of the practical consequences likely to follow from acceptance of this article of the Faith.

These objections are briefly stated, with much logical force and acuteness, in Mr. W. R. Greg's "Creed of Christendom."

"Forgiveness of Sins," he writes, "means one of two things: it either means saving a man from the consequences of his sins, *i.e.* interfering between cause and effect, in which case it is *working a miracle* (which God no doubt, can do, but which we have no right to expect that He will do, or to ask that he shall do) or it means an engagement to forbear retaliation, a suppression of the natural anger, felt against the offender by the offended party, a *foregoing of vengeance on the part of the injured*, in which meaning it is obviously quite inapplicable to a Being exempt and aloof from human passion. . . . The plain expression of the Book of Common Prayer, 'Neither take thou Vengeance of our sins,' embodies the real signification attached to the prayer for forgiveness by all who attach any definite signification to their prayers. Now this expression is an Old Testament or a Pagan expression, and can only be consistently and intelligibly used by those who entertain the same low ideas of God as the ancient Greeks and Hebrews entertained, that is, who think of Him as an irritable, jealous, and avenging Potentate. . . . If from this inconsistency, we take refuge in the

other meaning of the prayer for forgiveness, and assume that it is a prayer to God, that He will exempt us from the natural, and appointed consequences of our misdeeds, it is important that we should clearly define in our minds what it is that we are asking for. . . . The punishment of sin *consists in* the consequences of sin. These form a penalty most adequately heavy. A sin without its punishment is as complete a contradiction as a cause without an effect." [1]

In spite of what is stated in this passage, it may be assumed that most educated Christians, if asked to define forgiveness, would answer, exemption from the consequences of sin. Perhaps, it would be added that anyone who believes in a Supreme Personal God must necessarily look upon all law as an expression of His will, and that, therefore, it makes no difference whether we regard forgiveness as the exemption from the consequences of sin, or as God's forbearance to inflict vengeance.

In treatises on the Atonement, the idea that forgiveness means, a removal of the consequences of sin, seems to be often taken for granted; and it is usual to base arguments for the necessity of the Atonement on the fact that repentance, *per se*, does not do away with those consequences. Probably, one reason why such arguments fail to produce conviction is that the reply, 'Neither so far as our present experience goes, does the Atonement of Christ do so,' is so very obvious.

When we try to understand the idea of forgiveness as set before us in Holy Scripture, without allowing ourselves to be influenced by any system of popular theology, we shall probably come to the conclusion that Mr. Greg's classification of the possible meanings of forgiveness is not really exhaustive: that while we may allow that the expression, "Take not Vengeance of our sins," or other similar expressions in the Bible and Prayer Book, are to a certain extent anthropomorphic,

[1] "Creed of Christendom," 1st ed., ch. xvi., § v.

and must be used with care and caution, they yet contain a certain element of truth which it is important for us to hold.

Sin produces in us a sense of alienation from God, of unfitness to dwell in the light of God's presence, of a breach of that communion with God in which the highest life of the soul consists. The sinner is the Prodigal who has left his Father's home. "He is alienated in his mind in his evil works."[1]

Nor is the separation merely on the side of the sinner. "The Father counts the absent Prodigal as dead." "That the wrath of God abides on the unbelievers."[2] That "it is revealed from Heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men,"[3] is as much a doctrine of the gentle and spiritual St. John, and the evangelical St. Paul, as of those unenlightened Hebrews of old time who supposed that there was an intelligible meaning in the idea that the Lord loved righteousness and hated iniquity.

In God's hatred of sin, there can be nothing arbitrary, no element akin to unreasoning and ungoverned human passion. It is the arbitrariness, the unreasonableness of human vengeance, that makes it so unworthy.

Let us conceive the "Wrath of God" as an expression for God's essential unchanging hatred of sin, a hatred of sin which makes it impossible for unbroken communion to be maintained between the soul of the sinner and his Divine Creator; and we may well ask, "Is there anything unworthy or unreasonable in such a conception of God?"

How shall this communion be restored? In what way can sinful man be assured that he may have peace with God? Nothing but that which is holy and perfect can stand in God's presence. Here the work of the Lord Jesus Christ comes in. In a sinful world it was inevitable that the *perfect* doing of God's Will should entail sorrow and suffering. The Blood of Christ, *i.e.* the death of Christ, was therefore the consummation of the perfect doing of God's will. God's will

[1] Col. i. 21. [2] St. John, iii. 36. [3] Rom. i. 18.

has been done by man perfectly, even through suffering and death, and man stands accepted before God's throne.

The idea that the Lord Jesus as the second Adam is united with the whole race, and thus fitly represents the whole race, is one which runs all through the New Testament. That the essence of Christ's sacrifice consisted in the perfect doing of God's Will; that, apart from this, the mere blood-shedding was utterly useless and revolting, is brought before us forcibly, of all days in the year, on Good Friday in the Epistle for the day.[1] On this solemn subject it becomes us to speak with reverence, but so long as we hold that through Christ's sacrifice we have forgiveness of sins, *i. e.* are restored to perfect communion with God, we are in full accord with New Testament teaching; and if the view now put forth is found to harmonize with all the New Testament passages which speak of the Atonement, and to explain them sufficiently, it may well be doubted whether it is necessary to encumber ourselves with more difficult theories, which have proved a serious stumbling-block to thoughtful and inquiring minds.

But Christ has not merely fulfilled God's Will for us: what really brings the sense of acceptance is the fact that He enables us to fulfil God's Will, that He represents in his own person what man may become; what we, by the power of His life, are destined to become. Thus we may say God accepts us not for what we are, but for what He sees we may become in Christ.[2]

Apart from the Christian revelation, man would have been, as St. Paul says, "without hope," for while realizing that only a perfect service could enable him to live in communion with God, he must have been crushed down by the overpowering sense of sin, and of the impossibility of any approach to a perfect service.

[1] Heb. x. 1, *sqq.*

[2] See some admirable remarks on the Imputation of Christ's righteousness to sinners, in Gore's "Bampton Lectures," Lect. viii., § iv., p. 224.

Forgiveness of sins then implies: first, the restoration of communion with God which follows as a necessary consequence from the fact that the work of Christ makes a new and perfect life possible for mankind. It may also, to a certain extent, imply exemption from the consequences of sin. Thackeray, in one of his delightful "Roundabout Papers," dwells upon the fact that we are not always "found out" and punished as we deserve, and remarks that we are highly delighted whenever it so happens. Such a state of mind is utterly abhorrent to Mr. Greg. To wish not to be found out is, he conceives, like the wish of a sick man not to be saved from his sickness, since it is only by bearing the consequences of our sins that we can really be purified or improved. Mr. Greg seems even unwilling to admit the fact, so fully recognised by Bishop Butler, that this world does not manifest "the perfection of moral government." Be this as it may, while no Christian should persistently desire freedom from any suffering or trial which God may see to be necessary for his spiritual good, surely in this world where the consequences of sin do not always follow with the mathematical exactness and justice suggested by Mr. Greg, the prayer of the weak human being, who, oppressed with a sense of the grievousness of sin, and the awfulness of the consequences which might *justly* follow, desires that if it be his Heavenly Father's Will, he may not be found out and punished as he deserves in this world, is not to be harshly condemned, as something utterly wrong and unjustifiable.

At the same time, it is most important that those who are in earnest about their spiritual life should bear in mind that, in very many cases, the only way of safety, the only way of real amendment, is to be found in courageously bearing the natural consequences—whether shame, sorrow, or suffering—of their deeds, and that to shrink from the trial is the surest way of losing the blessings of peace and forgiveness.

But although forgiveness does not imply total exemption from the natural consequences of sin, it must be borne in mind that

Christ's atoning work effects a complete and radical change in the nature of those consequences.

The injury to our own spiritual nature, which Mr. Greg regards as the most certain and most terrible punishment of sin, remains; so that, to use words quoted by Mr. Greg, with admiration, "There must always be a wide difference between him who only ceases to do evil; and him who has always done well," but whereas, apart from the Christian doctrine of forgiveness, the fact that we have injured and weakened (and are constantly injuring and weakening) our spiritual nature, could only drive us to despair, the Christian doctrine holds out to us the promise of restoration and new creation, and inspires us with new hope and courage.

The natural external consequences of evil doing—pain, suffering, &c.—which Mr. Greg mentions in the second place, remain, but are to the Christian no longer signs of separation from God, and a hopeless condition of discord in his spiritual nature; but the loving chastisements of a gracious and reconciled Father, bringing with them the assurance of peace and blessing.

The sense of the evil done to others, which holds the third place in Mr. Greg's list, may perhaps seem to a sensitive mind to be the most dreadful and irremediable of all the consequences of sin. The fact that we have been the means of leading others into sin, and that the consequences of sin are seldom confined to the sinner himself, is a dreadful thought; and if there were no Gospel of forgiveness, it is hard to see how the utter hopelessness of the remorse, and the utter despair of any possibility of improvement for the world which the knowledge of this fact is calculated to produce, could possibly be borne.

When the Christian trusts in God's promise of forgiveness, and seeks in newness of life to make up, as far as he may, for a sinful past, he cannot, indeed, get rid of the sense of remorse for the evil which he has been the means of bringing upon others. This sense may be part of the burden which he must bear throughout his whole earthly life; but the knowledge of the

infinite love, which will assuredly seek out all God's erring children and do all that may be done to redeem and deliver them, will, at least, make the burden tolerable, and inspire the repentant sinner with more earnest desire to be a blessing to others, and to use all his gifts and powers for their good.

It has been assumed that the punishment of sin or the chastisements inflicted upon the sinner are wholly in the way of natural law; and, in general, we are not justified in considering any infliction which does not follow from sin, by way of natural consequence, as a judgment on any particular sin. At the same time, if we believe in a personal God, it does not seem to involve any unworthy conception of His nature, to suppose that He sometimes sends pain or suffering as a direct punishment of some sin with which it has no natural connexion; so long as we recognise that God punishes us, not to gratify any unworthy anger, not in any unreasoning or arbitrary way, but as the supreme and universal Judge, or as a gracious Father leading His children to repentance.

If we accept the view of the Christian doctrine of forgiveness, which has been stated, we shall not find it necessary to discuss the objections which have been made to the dangerous consequences likely to result from a belief in forgiveness of sins.

If it is as true for the repentant Christian as for the unrepentant man of the world, that "whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap," if the natural consequences of sin follow as certainly in one case as the other, whatever power the sense of those consequences may have to deter from sin, remains unaffected by the acceptance of Christian teaching.

In addition to this, it must be remembered that the awful sufferings and Passion of Christ, as set before us in the Gospels, have never ceased to act as a powerful deterrent from sin, awakening in men's minds an intense hatred of sin, an awful sense of the enormity of sin, and an intense love for the suffering Redeemer. Besides this, free forgiveness is only promised on

condition of true repentance, a fact which makes it impossible "to continue in sin that grace may abound."

The story told, in the work with which we have been dealing, of the hoary old sinner of mediæval times who refused to repent because he was not sure he was going to die, and did not want to forego any accustomed indulgence, only proves, at most, that imperfect views, and perhaps defective teaching, have sometimes led men to neglect the duty of repentance, or led to a false security; and is no argument against the Christian doctrine of forgiveness. Is not the lesson really taught by that story the very solemn lesson so forcibly impressed alike in Holy Scripture and by our experience of life of the awful danger of putting off repentance, and continuing in sin?

For what this story and others like it show is just this, that one may become so hardened in sin, and so deadened to all higher impulses, as to make repentance almost absolutely impossible.

LECTURE IV.

PROGRESS.

Rev. xxi. 5.

"Behold, I make all things new."

THE history of the European nations during the last fourteen or fifteen centuries has been, on the whole, a record of marked and continual progress. This progress has been so rapid during the last four hundred years; during that time such vast additions have been made to every branch of human knowledge, and physical science, in particular, has grown up with such marvellous rapidity; so many useful inventions have contributed to increase the wealth and comfort of mankind; while in addition to all this, so many changes have taken place in men's ideas and opinions, that it is not surprising that when we look back to the mediæval period, *i.e.*, roughly speaking, the period which intervened between the close of the fifth and the middle of the fifteenth century—we should take it for granted that it was a dreary time of ignorance and stagnation, during which nothing of any importance was effected for the welfare and advancement of the race.

We are the more ready to form a low and contemptuous estimate of the mediæval period, for this reason, that, as was pointed out at the close of the last lecture, we hardly realize how great a break the events of the fifth and sixth centuries have made in the continuity of European history, and to how great an extent the successive invasions of the barbarians—Franks, Goths, Vandals, Huns, Alans, and others, who passed, one after another, over the provinces of the Western Empire—swept away the old civilization, and inaugurated an entirely new order of things.

In theory indeed there was no break. In theory, the Roman emperor reigning in Constantinople continued to be master and ruler of the whole civilized world, and the administration of the Western provinces was still carried on in his name. The ancient forms of government—the mere externals of the old order of things—maintained an unbroken existence, and the name of Rome still continued to inspire men's minds with awe and reverence.

To understand the history of the Middle Ages it is necessary to bear in mind this continuity of what may be called, the outer shell and form of the Roman empire. But while we grasp this fact and, under the guidance of the late Professor Freeman, learn to understand its significance, and as we begin to realize how great a debt the civilization of modern Europe owes to ancient Rome, we are, perhaps, in some danger of attaching undue importance to this aspect of European history, and of forgetting that an essentially new order of things, with a vigorous life of its own, was growing up under the shelter

and shadow of the Roman name. For when we look beneath the surface of things ; when we attempt to bring before our minds a vivid picture of that period of strife and confusion ; when we take the trouble to compare the state of things in the third and fourth centuries with the state of things at the close of the sixth : we begin indeed to realize the extent and significance of the change. To pass from the third century to the seventh is like entering into a new world. In the seventh century, we have no longer to do with the strong government and high civilization of Imperial Rome, but with a congeries of new nations—vigorous indeed and energetic, and already giving fair promise of future greatness, but rude and undisciplined, and still sunk in a state of semi-barbarism. In Gaul, in Italy, and in Spain, these new nations were of mixed blood—the barbarian invaders having amalgamated with the remnant of the older population—and it is not easy to determine the relative proportions of the different elements ; but it is evident, at all events, that a long period of war, disorder, and confusion had reduced the remnant of the older inhabitants of those provinces to the level of the barbarian invaders with whom they had amalgamated.

In the days of the Antonines, the diffusion of a moderate level of culture and education was probably as general as it is in our own time and country. In the towns and cities, the great majority even of the humblest classes were at least able to read and write. Contrast with this the state of things in the seventh and eighth centuries, when it was quite common for nobles, and even for kings, to be unable to write their names, and when

anyone whose education had advanced beyond the elementary arts of reading and writing would have been considered, as a scholar, of very respectable attainments, and the extent of the change will be at once realized.

In any attempt to attain a true insight into the history of the mediæval period, we must also remember the nature and extent of the missionary work which had to be undertaken amongst tribes and nations lying beyond the limits of the older Roman Empire, and who had never yet come under the influence of the Roman civilization.

When these facts are taken into account, when on the one hand, we form a just estimate of the real nature and effects of the events of the fifth and sixth centuries, and, on the other hand, consider the greatness of the work accomplished in the evangelization of the whole of Europe, we shall have no difficulty in realizing that the mediæval period cannot possibly have been the age of complete stagnation, which has sometimes been imagined; but that it must have been a period of true and real progress, in which the foundations were securely laid for the more wonderful and more rapid advance of the last four hundred years.

The period which intervened between the sack of Rome, A.D. 476, and the reign of Charlemagne, A.D. 800, was not indeed an age of extensive commerce or of great literary activity. From the very nature of the case, it was quite impossible that it should be so. But during those centuries the new nations were being formed, were settling down in their new homes, and were gradually learning the meaning and application of those principles of law and government which they had inherited

from the older empire. The writings of the Schoolmen, which formed the principal literary production of the succeeding period, were, no doubt, often dull and pedantic, while many of the questions which they discussed appear to us to have been exceedingly puerile, and even ridiculous.

But we could hardly expect that men would attain all at once to the enlightenment, freedom of thought, and breadth of view so characteristic of the thinkers of the nineteenth century; and while we laugh at the follies and absurdities of the Schoolmen, we ought not to forget how much solid work they really accomplished in formulating and explaining Christian doctrine, while, above all, we should remember how much the thinkers of more modern times owe to their painstaking and laborious efforts. Their scientific methods, their logical treatment of the subjects with which they dealt, and their careful accuracy of expression, have had a permanent value, and been of inestimable service in the training of the human mind. Freedom of thought and speculation were not indeed tolerated or understood; but for the race as well as for the individual, it is true that a childhood of restraint and kindly discipline is the necessary preparation for perfect freedom in maturer years; and so, on the whole, we cannot doubt that it was greatly for the advantage of generations to come, that the human intellect should, in the mediæval period, be trained and exercised under such restraints and limitations as were imposed upon the schoolmen.

It may, perhaps, be thought that this subject of progress, however interesting and important it may be in its own way, is, however, quite outside the sphere of religion, and even of morals.

Progress, it may be said, is wholly concerned with such mundane matters as the advance of knowledge, the growth of science, and the increase of material prosperity. Men grow more learned, more highly cultured, more wealthy, but, considered as a whole, they do not grow better. They learn new facts about physical laws, and the general constitution of the universe; but nothing new is ever added to the laws of morality. Nay, rather, if there is any connexion between progress and religion, is there not reason to think that it is chiefly in the way of antagonism? For may it not be said that, as a general rule, when knowledge and wealth are increased, human life becomes so much fuller and more complete in itself that men cease to feel the necessity for those religious beliefs and consolations which made up to some extent for the poverty and wretchedness of earlier times, so that the more rapid the progress, the greater the decline of the theological spirit?

But, although a plausible case may be made out for this view,[1] especially if we are content with a survey of the mere outside of things, more careful reflection will certainly convince us that true progress—the progress which we value—consists of much more than the mere increase of knowledge or of wealth; or rather, that knowledge and wealth are not really valuable in themselves, but are only prized as means to an end, that end being the true happiness and well-being of mankind.

It is by its success in attaining this end that all true

[1] As, *e.g.*, in the earlier chapters of Buckle's "Civilization in England."

progress is really measured ; and if the historian in dealing with this subject devotes much of his attention to the consideration of the increase of material prosperity and the advance of knowledge, it is only because it is assumed that these things tend to increase the happiness of mankind, and to bring men nearer to that ideal state of perfection, in which true well-being is supposed to consist.

But, "A man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth."[1] An ingenious combination of a mere animal and an intellectual machine is not, after all, an adequate definition of a human being. A true man values the things which he possesses—his knowledge and his worldly wealth—just in so far as these things minister to the wants of his higher nature, and help him to satisfy the demands of that emotional, moral, and spiritual side of his being, which he knows to be highest and of greatest intrinsic worth.

Thus, whenever we think about the progress of the race, we turn our attention, *in the first place*, not to the increase of wealth, nor even to the growth of knowledge, but rather to the changes which have taken place in men's views on religion, morals, politics, and social life. We ask, Are the views held on these great subjects broader, truer, more humane than they used to be? and we find that the reason why we attach so much importance to those other matters which have been referred to, is that we feel convinced that, with fuller knowledge and wider culture, and the powers and opportunities afforded by the increase of material prosperity, men ought to gain a truer insight

[1] St. Luke, xii. 15.

into the nature and value of spiritual things and clearer ideas on all matters which concern their relations with their fellows.

Perhaps we do not, as time goes on, discover any new rules or principles of morality. It may, perhaps, be true, as Mr. Buckle, Mr. Cotter Morison, and others have asserted, that Christianity has introduced no single rule of duty or principle of conduct which had not been inculcated by other teachers of morality before Christ appeared; nor is there anything in this, admitting it to be true, which ought to surprise us very much. It is not possible for human beings to live together and work together without some sort of established code of morals, or without acknowledging mutual rights and mutual obligations. If it is true that moral laws contain their reason and justification in their very nature or, in theological language, that they are the laws which are written in men's hearts, it is not to be wondered at that all the fundamental laws of morality should have been discovered and formulated long before the comparatively late period at which Christianity made its first appearance in the world.

It may, however, be justly claimed on behalf of Christianity that it has at least formulated anew, combined in a perfect and harmonious whole, and set forth with distinctness all those moral principles which are necessary for our guidance, and that there are many principles of conduct which, though following necessarily from a right understanding of fundamental moral laws, the nations of Europe might never have succeeded in discovering for themselves, or might, at best, have discovered only after long ages of trial and uncertainty, if they had not been

proclaimed with such fulness and distinctness by the Christian Church.

It may be true that the great teacher Guatama taught men to love their enemies some centuries before the Sermon on the Mount was delivered, but it is from the Sermon on the Mount, and not from the teaching of Guatama, that we have learned this great lesson, and it is to the teaching of Christ we owe it, that at the present day a revengeful and unforgiving spirit is universally despised and condemned.

But, above all, it must be remembered that it does not follow that, because all the fundamental principles of morality must have been known and roughly formulated from a very early period, no real advance or improvement in the accepted standard of morality and in the accepted views of duty is possible as time goes on.

Because the ancient Greeks—perhaps the Egyptians in still earlier times—knew all the fundamental principles of geometry quite as well as we do, it does not by any means follow that the science of geometry has not made any progress since the times of Euclid or Archimedes. Just as in geometry we have learned to draw many new deductions from well-established fundamental principles, as by means of such deductions we have reached many new and important results, and have gained a deeper insight into the whole subject of the nature of space-relations, so, in the sphere of character and conduct, we have surely learned to apply the old principles to new cases, and with the advance of knowledge and culture have gained broader and deeper views of our duty to our fellow men. We may not be able to improve on the old definition of justice, "Voluntas

suum cuique tribuendi," but surely we have learned to find a much wider and deeper signification in the words than was possible in the Middle Ages, as we have a very much broader conception of what is included in the due or right which is to be rendered to every man.

It would be easy to enumerate many facts which might serve to illustrate the truth of what has just been stated. For example, we might dwell upon the increased interest taken in social questions in the present day, and the earnestness of modern efforts to improve the condition of the poor and to alleviate human suffering.

Why do we hear so much now-a-days of the suffering and wrongs of the poor? It is not that a larger proportion of the population is more deeply sunk in hopeless poverty than ever before; it is not that the lot of the very poor is really more wretched and hopeless than it used to be in olden times. On the contrary, it may safely be said that the great majority, even of the very poor, enjoy a greater amount of actual comfort than at any former period.

But with the growth of culture, purified and nourished by the spirit of Christianity, our sympathies have grown at once quicker and keener; we enter more readily into the feelings of others, and feel more strongly than men ever felt before, that none of us can dare to say, "Am I my brother's keeper?"

Or, again, consider the modern view of warfare; how completely warfare has changed its character since the early Middle Ages. How many barbarous evils, which in the Middle Ages were tacitly acquiesced in or ignored, have entirely disappeared from modern warfare. It is now fully recognised by all civilized nations that, in carrying

on war, the least possible injury should be inflicted on non-combatants; while everything that Christian care and self-denying charity and zeal can do to relieve the suffering of the wounded is done as a matter of course, and without distinction of party or nationality. But, further, although warfare has not been abolished as yet amongst civilized nations, although the condition of modern Europe does not afford much ground for hoping that it will very soon cease to play any part in the history of the world, yet can any thoughtful person doubt for a moment that a very great change has come over men's feelings with reference to the whole subject of warfare? It is more generally felt than it used to be that war is, at best, a frightful evil, and essentially a barbarous practice. We are no longer carried away by childish admiration of "the pomp and circumstance of glorious war": rather have we learned to hate and dread that scourge of humanity, that cause of so much cruel and wanton waste of human life and human energy, that desolator of so many happy homes, that fruitful source of so many tears, so many broken hearts. When we consider this great change which has come over the minds of men, and the truer views which prevail so widely, surely it is not too much to hope that the day is not so far distant after all, when war between civilized nations shall have become a thing of the past.

But, although it may be admitted that with the advance of knowledge and general culture there is usually a real advance in morality, it may perhaps seem doubtful whether, when we turn to consider the spiritual and emotional side of our nature, we do not find a tendency

to degeneration and decay. Moral progress need not necessarily be religious in character; and when we consider the great wave of unbelief which seems at present to be passing over the civilized world, and the increasing difficulty which cultured people seem to experience in keeping a firm hold of any definite religious faith, we may perhaps be led to imagine that the advance of knowledge tends to develope a spirit of materialism.

The study of the physical sciences, and the living and overwhelming sense of the reality of the reign of law which springs naturally from such studies, have, no doubt, *in some cases*, a tendency to lead men away from belief in God. On the other hand, it seems impossible to believe that, in the long run, the fuller knowledge of all the wonders of nature, gained by these studies, will not create a deeper and more reverent sense of the infinite wisdom and majesty of the great Creator.

Be this as it may, we may be sure, at all events, that man will never live by physical science alone, but that so long as the world lasts, those spiritual instincts which lead man to look upwards and realize his connexion with the Infinite will remain, and claim to be satisfied.

When we look at the facts closely and honestly, we shall have abundant reason to be convinced that the dominant spirit in the present day is not an irreverent or unbelieving spirit, but that the apparent decay of belief is really a sign of the growth of a deeper and truer spiritualism. Our age is not merely an age of candid reasoning and clear thinking, but also an age of deep feeling and broad sympathies. It is because men are dissatisfied with old formulæ, with narrow and insufficient

views of the divine nature, and of spiritual things such as were sufficient for the needs of an earlier generation, and are seeking for some deeper and more adequate expression for divine and spiritual realities, that they often appear to be in such violent revolt against religion. Ideas which once had a living power, which were living manifestations, as it were, of the divine nature and of divine truth, have now become dumb idols which must be cast "to the moles and to the bats," in order that men may seek anew the living God Himself, and, bowing down before Him in humblest adoration, find in communion with Him the only true and abiding rest for their souls.[1]

If theology is supposed to consist of certain peculiar established formulæ, of one particular way of stating and interpreting spiritual facts, there can be little doubt that the theological spirit is on the decline, and that theology is likely to fade away as knowledge grows and

[1] It must be remembered that while, in some cases, views of truth and formulated opinions, once popular, may be really faulty because of their inherent narrowness, insufficiency, and even untruthfulness, it is much oftener the case that the fault is the result of the general change of circumstances and of opinions, in consequence of which fundamentally important truths assume new aspects, and require to be stated in new terms. The old forms and expressions then become meaningless and absurd—mere dead letters, which express no living truth, but only serve as idle party watchwords. "The world," says Dr. Salmon, "is continually haunted by the ghosts of departed opinions." It is natural that those who have been taught to take these ghosts for the living realities of religion, should assume an attitude of opposition to religion in general. For this reason it is evidently most desirable that the decent burial, which, according to ancient belief, laid the ghost, and put an end to his restless wanderings, should be performed as speedily as possible. A single example may

advances. But if theology means something more than this, if it means the living expression of vital truth in a form suited to the spiritual needs of each succeeding age, then it does not require any very deep knowledge of human nature to enable us to prophesy that theology will never perish or lose its power; on the contrary, we may rest assured that, with each real step in advance, it will grow in fulness and in power, and that as human nature becomes richer in other respects, it will become more truly and sincerely spiritual, and be inspired with a higher and holier sense of the meaning of spiritual truths. As long as the world lasts, the prayer of the truest men will ever be:—

> "Let knowledge grow from more to more,
> But more of reverence in us dwell,
> That mind and heart according well
> May make one music as before."[1]

But, whatever form the theology of the future may

illustrate this. No one can study the great Justification controversy of the sixteenth century without feeling how utterly empty and meaningless the whole dispute seems to modern ears. But yet no one who is able to enter at all into the feelings and views of men of other times and other schools of thought can fail to recognise that, in spite of some exaggeration of expression, Martin Luther was really contending for an important spiritual truth of permanent and abiding value. Reginald Pole, deeply imbued with a sense of the importance of that truth, was profoundly dissatisfied with the Tridentine decisions on Justification (see Dr. Hook's "Archbishops of Canterbury"). To us it will probably seem that all that is really important may be held by anyone, even though he frankly accepts the Tridentine decrees. The peculiar expressions and formulæ to which so much importance was then attached, have become for us dead and meaningless.

[1] Tennyson, "In Memoriam."

assume, we may, at all events, rest assured that it will undoubtedly be Christian theology. If we are to believe, with living faith, that Jesus Christ is God, we must learn this truth, not merely from a theological formula, but from living communion with the Divine Saviour. We must learn it by lovingly dwelling upon His words, and trying to understand and lay to heart the meaning of His holy life, and by drawing near to Him in prayer and holy meditation. When once we have thus learned to feel and know that Christ is God, when we have thus learned "to see the glory of God in the face of Christ Jesus," we shall not need any arguments to convince us that the world will never outgrow the religion of Christ, will never find a higher or more perfect expression of divine truth, a more complete and heavenly standard of holiness.

What makes Christianity emphatically the religion of progress is just this, that it is found capable of satisfying man's needs at every stage in human progress; that, although *it* abides the same, yet *we* learn from age to age to understand it better, and, as we understand it better, to love and reverence it the more: that we feel convinced, that Christian principles of duty and conduct will always be found a sufficient guide for human life, while the presentation of spiritual truths and the conception of the divine nature given by Christ will never be out-grown.

True progress, then, must consist, not merely in the increase of knowledge and of wealth, but also in the development of a higher standard of morality, the growth of a higher and more perfect character, and the attainment of truer and nobler views of religion. Not only so, but

at every stage of progress, moral and spiritual influences are important, as means for the attainment, not only of the highest ends of humanity, but also of all the other good things for which men strive. Such influences form, in fact, the *regulating* and *controlling* power in the growth and development of the race.

Bearing this in mind, we cannot help thinking that Mr. Lecky hardly does full justice to the value of the service rendered by Christianity to the cause of progress when he speaks of religion as being *useful* as a "mere tincture," giving a certain tone and colour to civilization.[1] Surely the influence for good which Christianity has exercised upon the course of European civilization has been much more than this.

In dealing with the progress of the European nations,

[1] "History of European Morals," vol. ii., ch.. iv., p. 16, Library Edition.

Mr. Lecky uses the word 'theology' in this passage, but it is evident that he is dealing with the work of the Church in the Middle Ages considered as a whole, and that by theology he means here Christianity in the form in which it was then generally received.

Probably Mr. Lecky would admit that *religion*, as he conceives it, is fitted to be a "controlling arbiter of civilization," but, if so, that it must be a religion freed from the trammels of theology. The view taken in this lecture is that true religion must always find expression in a true, or *relatively* true, theology. The theology of the Middle Ages may have been faulty in many respects, and it would be going too far to assert that it was the form best suited for the needs of the time. Perhaps it was the best that could be attained in the actual condition of the race. For the historian, the important fact is that it was the actual form under which Christianity was then presented and the teaching of the Church the only means by which spiritual influences could be brought to bear upon the world.

we must, of course, take account of the national characteristics, the vigour, the intellectual power, the force of character of the European races. We must also take account of the favourable circumstances in which they were placed. But to leave out of sight the influence of Christian faith, Christian teaching, and Christian discipline, would surely be like forgetting or ignoring the value of the sunshine and the showers in giving an account of the causes of the growth and ripening of the harvest.

The desire for knowledge is, no doubt, natural to human beings, but it may fairly be questioned whether the difficulties and labour involved in its acquisition would not effectually check the successful pursuit of knowledge if men were not animated by a high sense of duty. Not without reason does Lord Bacon speak of the knowledge of God as the first inducement and encouragement to the pursuit of knowledge. The desire for wealth on the part of the individual is a selfish and even a sordid passion, but in the case of the community it is not so. For the successful pursuit of wealth by the community it is necessary that men should learn to trust each other, and to make sacrifices for the common good, and, consequently, that their lives should be guided and controlled by a high moral standard.

Attempts have been made to show the extent of the influence which Christianity has had upon the progress of civilization by enumerating the many reforms in laws and customs which have taken place from time to time during the last fifteen centuries. It is, indeed, perfectly fair and just that these reforms should be put down to the credit of Christianity since they took place in a society

which acknowledged the supremacy of the Christian religion, and which accepted Christian teaching as its rule of life; but what it is most important that we should remember is this, that all the various reforms which can be enumerated, such as the abolition of slavery or of private warfare, and the enactment of laws tending to the welfare of humanity, must be regarded as signs of the working of forces which were constantly in operation throughout the whole of society, modifying men's views, and inspiring them with a more humane and Christlike spirit. The general improvement in men's thoughts and ideas, and the growth of a better and more truly civilized state of society, cover a much wider sphere, and are of much greater importance for the welfare of the race, than the mere series of laws and enactments which serve as occasional landmarks to indicate the direction in which civilization is advancing.

In the very darkest ages, the worship of the church, carried on without intermission, must have turned men's thoughts away from earthly strifes and earthly pursuits, and called them to higher and holier things. There never was a time, even in the days of darkest superstition, when that worship failed to point men to Christ, and to teach them something of the meaning of His holy life, His heavenly teaching, His atoning sacrifice; enough to restrain the growth of vice to some extent, and to exercise a softening and sanctifying effect upon human life.

Again, many evils have undoubtedly sprung from the system of monasticism which occupied so prominent a position in the ecclesiastical organization of the middle ages. Probably very few would really desire to see a

revival of monasticism in this nineteenth century. But yet, our sense of the evils which were connected with it should not blind us to the fact that monasticism filled an important place in the development of civilization, and in its own day rendered valuable service to the cause of progress. In ages of strife and barbarous warfare, it set before men the ideal of a life of peace and industry, and taught them to acknowledge that ideal as holiest and best of all. In ages of ferocity and rude license the very existence of monasticism was a witness to the value and beauty of purity and self-denial.

Nor must we leave out of sight, when dealing with this subject of progress, the spirit of deep earnestness—the awful sense of the importance and worth of life, and of the nearness of eternity—which has been a peculiar and striking characteristic of the Christian civilization, and which bears witness more forcibly than anything else to the reality of that new life which Christianity has brought into the world.

That earnestness has, indeed, at times assumed hateful and repulsive forms. The ferocity with which the controversies of the early centuries were carried on does not perhaps afford a pleasing or profitable subject for contemplation; but, at all events, we cannot think of those fierce controversies without realizing that those who took part in them were dreadfully in earnest, and deeply impressed with a sense of the awful importance of spiritual things.

The story of the persecutions which have taken place in the name of Christ, and under the sanction of the Christian Church, is undoubtedly the blackest and most hateful chapter in the history of the Church; and no true

Christian can think of those persecutions with any other feelings than those of shame and abhorrence.

But when we remember that the earnestness which Christianity has engendered in the world has not been wholly or even principally expended in such manifestations of perverse and misdirected zeal; when we consider all the self-sacrificing and heroic work for the good of mankind which has sprung from this source, and think of those who have from age to age given their lives to the service of their fellows—of the labours of the missionaries, who have carried light and knowledge to the dark places of the earth, of those who have joyfully toiled and laboured for the relief of the poor and suffering—we may thankfully acknowledge that such things as these represent the true aim and object of Christian earnestness—an aim and object which, we may well hope, will be better understood and more effectually accomplished as time goes on, and we learn to understand more truly the spirit of our Lord and Master. When this truth is clearly realized, we shall cease to be haunted by the vague dread that the growth of a more charitable and tolerant spirit may, perhaps, lead to mere indifference; for we shall rest assured that the power and life which come to us from the living Christ will still work in the world, and be manifested in ever brighter radiance and more perfect glory in Christ-like works of mercy and of love.

The history of the rise and fall of many ancient civilizations, from the days of the Accadians or the Hittites to the days of the decline and fall of the Roman Empire, seems to show that, although there is undoubtedly a natural law of progress, though there are forces inherent

in human nature which tend to the advancement and development of man and society, yet that here, as elsewhere in nature, the law of decay and death prevails, and that once a certain point is reached, the forces which tend to destruction are victorious over those which make for life and growth.

Possibly, as each of those ancient civilizations perished or decayed, it handed on something to those who came after, so that the whole history of our race, though marked by many an ebb and flow, has been a record of continual progress. Whether this be so or not, at all events we cannot but feel that the religion of Christ occupies an unique position, and that it is only when looked at in connexion with the history of the world as a whole, that it begins to appear in its true greatness.

We see that man was made for a full and perfect life —a life of culture and knowledge in which all his powers and faculties may be developed, and have full and free exercise. We see also that man has not attained his ideal, but that under the action of purely natural forces and natural laws, he seems destined to struggle upwards for a while, and then fall back again.

> "Thou wilt not leave us in the dust;
> Thou madest man—he knows not why;
> He thinks he was not made to die,
> And Thou hast made him: Thou art just."

True of the individual, must not these words be equally true of the race? Man with his bright hopes, his glorious visions of a heavenly kingdom and a golden age never yet realized on earth: surely he was not made to struggle wearily for ever, but in vain, for the realization of the

glorious destiny for which he feels that he was created. As we realize this, and then consider how the religion of Christ, in the fulness of time, entered into the world, with its mighty power to sustain and support men in the onward march of progress, to lead them ever onward and upward, and to satisfy the deepest needs of the human spirit more and more fully, as men grow and advance in knowledge and culture, we feel that Christianity is indeed no isolated fact, no casual result of blindly working forces, not one of the many systems in which men have expressed their ideas of the Infinite and Eternal, but that it is the one great central fact of history, the true crown and completion of the whole work of creation, the means provided by God for realizing that which is the goal of all true progress, the perfect manifestation of the Kingdom of God.

LECTURE V.

THE SPIRIT OF THE AGE.

St. Matth. xxviii. 20.

"Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world."

NO one who has any acquaintance with the current literature of the day can be ignorant that there are many intelligent and thoughtful people who believe, or profess to believe, that the subjects with which we have been occupied in the preceding lectures, the Mission of Christianity to the World, and the connexion between the work of the Gospel of Christ, and the progress of the human race, are little more than matters of historical or antiquarian interest; that henceforth Christianity can have no mission to the world; that it has no longer any power to appeal to men's hearts or exercise any influence over human life, since it can no longer be accepted by the world as the living truth of God; that the time has at length come when the religion of Christ must be cast aside as "a creed outworn," one of those "little systems" of human invention "which have their day and cease to be." In the new day of clearer light and fuller knowledge which has now dawned upon the world, men are

forced to realize—so we are assured—that the old belief in a revelation from God, in an incarnate Saviour, in the wonderful life of Christ, and in His resurrection from the dead which have so long cheered and comforted our hearts, were but dreams and visions of the night, the childish fancies of deluded men in an uncritical and unenlightened age, destined to fade away for ever from consciousness, as men awake to a living sense of the sober realities of life.

It is useless to look back with regret and longing to the idle visions which seemed to shed a glory upon the night of darkness and ignorance. Whether we will or no, we can no longer hold fast to the belief in a risen Christ triumphant over death and Hades. The beautiful vision has already grown very faint and dim; instead of the open grave and the risen Saviour, we are but too conscious that we can only see—

> "Upon a stone that was not rolled aside
> A shadow sit upon a grave—a shade
> As thin as unsubstantial as of old
> Came, the Greek poet told
> To lick the life-blood in the trench Ulysses made."[1]

It is not that any new facts have come to light which convincingly prove that the received account of the life and works of Christ and His Apostles is untrue; it is not that any of the old lines of argument brought forward in defence of the truth of the creed of Christendom have been shown to be fallacious. On the contrary, it might, at first sight, seem to an impartial observer

[1] Clough, "The Shadow."

that the controversies of the last hundred or hundred and fifty years have not only done much to clear away prejudice, but have also tended to bring out into greater distinctness the great weight of evidence for the truth of the facts which form the basis of the Christian faith.

It is no longer necessary for the Christian apologist to expend time and labour in proving that the story of Christ's resurrection was neither a conscious fabrication, nor a later addition—a myth which grew up somehow in the Christian Church long after the first establishment of Christianity—for it is admitted on all sides as an established fact that the Apostles and earliest disciples of our Lord were sincerely and earnestly persuaded of the truth of their Master's resurrection.

Again, when the question of the credibility of miracles is discussed, it is no longer necessary to deal with the objection that miracles are incredible, because a miracle involves a violation of the laws of nature. Sixty years ago, when Thomas Carlyle wrote "Sartor Resartus," it is evident that this was still regarded as a formidable objection, and the few scornful words with which it was dismissed by Carlyle are well worthy of quotation :—

"System of nature. To the minnow, every cranny and pebble of, and quality and accident of, his little native creek may have become familiar; but does the minnow understand the ocean tides and periodic currents, the trade winds and monsoons, and the moon's eclipses, by all which the conditions of his native creek are regulated, and may, from time to time (unmiraculously enough), be overset and reversed? Such a minnow is man; his creek this planet earth; his ocean the immeasurable all; and

his monsoons and periodic currents, the mysterious course of Providence through æons of æons."[1]

It is now fully conceded, on all hands, that no valid *à priori* reason can be given why God should not manifest His presence and will, should He desire to do so, by some supernatural sign, or by endowing His messenger with supernatural powers; and even Professor Huxley admits that there is nothing to prevent his believing in a miracle if sufficient and satisfactory evidence for the reality of such an occurrence could be furnished; if, for example, he could only see a miracle performed, be allowed to cross-examine the miracle-worker, and subject the performance to some kind of searching scientific test.

But yet, it will be said, in spite of all this, and although the evidences for the truth of Christianity have by no means been overthrown by any direct process of reasoning, or by the discovery of any new facts connected with the history of its origin, when we look beneath the surface we cannot fail to realize that those evidences have completely broken down and become practically worthless.

Evidence which does not appeal to something in a man's mind and tend to produce conviction is really no evidence at all; and since, with the spread of knowledge, and with our new and enlarged views, our whole tone or habit of thought has undergone such a radical change that it has become, or is rapidly becoming, absolutely impossible for us to believe in the reality of the miraculous or the supernatural, it follows that the evidence for the Gospel miracles has completely lost its power to appeal to our minds.

[1] Carlyle, "Sartor Resartus," Bk. iii., ch. viii.

Vast numbers of people, even of educated and cultured people, still cling to the truths of the Christian religion, and it is impossible to deny that Christianity still exercises a considerable influence over the lives of great numbers of men and women. But although these people may fancy that they still have an assured faith in the living Christ, yet, once they begin to question seriously with themselves, they will find that they do not and cannot really believe in the recorded facts of Christ's life as actual historical occurrences, that their whole habit of thought, their whole tone of mind, makes it impossible for them to do so. Not only so, but in the present state of the world men will, of necessity, come to realize this more and more, will find themselves more and more compelled to come definitely face to face with questions as to the foundation and the reality of their professed beliefs, and, as they do so, will realize that, almost unconsciously, the old cherished beliefs have faded away and dissolved into thin air.

Whether men will or no, they cannot help feeling the influence of the Spirit of the age—the general tone of thought and feeling, made up, indeed, of the thoughts and opinions of many individuals, and yet something different from any individual set of opinions or beliefs; rather, a subtle and all-pervading influence, which the poetic fancy naturally endows with a sort of *quasi*-personality.

It is this Spirit of the age, then,—a very matter-of-fact every-day spirit—which so influences the mass of mankind as to make any belief in the supernatural impossible.

The rapid progress of physical science in recent times, the many wonderful discoveries with which our stores of

knowledge have been enriched, our fuller and more complete knowledge of the laws of nature, together with the general diffusion of scientific knowledge, to a greater or less extent amongst all classes, have brought home to men, as it was never brought home before, a living sense of the universal reign of law.

Scientific methods have been applied, not only to the phenomena of nature, but also to the facts of human history and of social life. The scientific study of history, which is in a special sense a product of our own age, has worked wonders, and by its aid a flood of new light has been thrown on the events of former times and on the origin and growth of human institutions. Nor does the scientific historian confine himself to the secular affairs of the world. The origin and development of religion and of religious ideas, the growth of myths and legends, the relations between the various forms in which the religious idea has clothed itself at different times : all those branches of inquiry, in a word, which are classed together under the name of "comparative theology," afford inexhaustible subjects of interest to the scientific historian, and in these, as in every other department of human knowledge, he is able to exemplify the all-pervading reign of law.

The study of comparative theology brings out many curious points of resemblance between Christianity and other forms of religious belief ; and if, on the one hand, it is conceded that no *à priori* reasons can be given to prove the impossibility of miracles, on the other hand, we have to take account of the fact, now brought out with so much distinctness, that stories of miracles and supernatural

manifestations are so far from being peculiar to Christianity that they may almost be considered as an element common to every form of religious belief. In the words of an eminent writer of the present day we have learned that, "in certain stages of society and under the action of certain principles of human nature, an accretion of miracles is invariably formed around every prominent personage or institution. We look for them as we look for showers in April, or for harvest in autumn."[1]

When, therefore, it is brought home to our minds, with such living force and intensity, that all things in the world, from the greatest to the least, are under the control of invariable natural laws, that every event is connected by way of natural causation with what preceded it, that all the facts of history can be explained as a result of the laws of human nature, together with the circumstances in which man has been placed; when it is shown that religion in general, and all other forms of religion in particular, are natural products, quite as truly as civil government or commercial institutions, it is not strange that we should experience some difficulty in believing that the form of religion which we profess, and which has prevailed for a limited time and over a limited area, is any exception to the general rule, or that we should be inclined to imagine that, if we had sufficient knowledge of the facts of the case, we should be able to account for the origin of Christianity as the result of purely natural causes.

[1] Lecky's "History of European Morals," Library Edition, vol. i., p. 373.

Besides all this, we have to take into account the fact that the clearness of thought and the habit of exact definition, which are characteristic of the scientific spirit, compel us to give precise and definite shape to all our conceptions; and since we find that every attempt to give such shape and form to our conception of the Divine and Eternal Being must land us in hopeless confusion and contradictions, we find it exceedingly difficult to retain any living faith, even in the Divine Creator.[1]

Although we may feel assured that the statements so often and so confidently made, of the general decay of faith and of the prevalence of this spirit of disbelief in the supernatural are much exaggerated, and although there are many unmistakable signs that the religion of Christ has still a very living hold on the world in which we live, yet we cannot shut our eyes to the fact that there is a considerable element of truth in this description of the Spirit of the age as a spirit of doubt and disbelief in the supernatural, that very many earnest and thoughtful minds are harassed by anxieties and difficulties as to the foundations of their faith, and that the majority of people realize the difficulty of retaining a living faith in the supernatural more intensely than it was ever realized in any former period.

The Christian cannot ignore the Spirit of the age, or treat it as something unworthy of serious consideration. At the same time, there is surely no need for him to give

1 For a clear statement of this line of argument see Mr. Leslie Stephen's Essay, "An Agnostic's Apology," recently republished. (Smith, Elder, & Co., London, 1892.)

way to terror or despair, or to suppose for a moment that the cause of Christ will not, in the long run, be triumphant.

The Lord's promise to be with His people always, even to the end of the world, has proved true for nearly two thousand years. In many different ages, amidst all the vicissitudes of the world's history, He has never failed to appeal, with power, to the hearts of men of all sorts and classes; He has brought true light and knowledge to the barbarous and ignorant; He has guided and strengthened the noblest and highest of the sons of men in their earthly conflict; He has brought comfort to the sad and sorrowing, and whispered words of peace and hope to the heart of the mourner; He has exercised a mighty influence upon the course of history, and has moulded and directed the course of progress and civilization.

Surely we have good grounds for believing that the promise, which has so long proved true, will not fail to be fulfilled in the future, that Christ can still appeal, with undiminished power, to the hearts of men of our own age.

The Spirit of the age is, after all, no fixed unalterable entity; much less is it a Divine and Eternal God before whom we must needs fall down and worship in fear and trembling. Vague and undefined, fickle and uncertain, it changes from day to day. The spirit of to-day is not the same as the spirit of yesterday; nor will the spirit of to-morrow be the same as that of to-day. If we really believe in a God of truth; if we are convinced that the God of the Christian revelation is indeed the same as the God of nature; we must feel assured that every real advance in knowledge must, in the long run, tend to

place the Faith on a firmer and surer basis, and lead us to a broader and truer view of the meaning and contents of Christianity.

If, on the one hand, the increase of knowledge and the growth of the scientific spirit teach us to seek for clear and well-defined conceptions; on the other hand, it must be remembered that they compel us to recognise the more clearly the necessary limitations of our knowledge and of our powers, and the necessity for practical life of accepting mysterious and incomprehensible facts which defy all our efforts to analyse or explain them.

While we have to face such inexplicable mysteries as must ever be connected with the fact of our own personality; while we can never hope to give any explanation of the mysterious connexion between mind and matter, or to reconcile the belief (which we find to be a necessity for practical life) in human responsibility and in the reality of our moral nature with the universal prevalence of the reign of law, we can hardly be surprised if our finite minds are unable to comprehend, in a clear and adequate conception, the nature of the Infinite and Eternal; nor, as we learn to realize that a living faith in God is really a necessity for human nature, inasmuch as it answers to a felt need, shall we find any difficulty in accepting as infallibly true, and adequate for all practical purposes, the revelation of a Heavenly Father and Divine Ruler given through our hearts and consciences, and confirmed by the revelation of Jesus Christ our Lord.

Again, we may safely say that it will never be possible to think of the structure of the human eye or human ear without associating with the thought the idea of a purpose

or design, or to fail to recognise in the innumerable and wonderful instances of the adaptation of means to ends, which meet us on every side in the realm of nature, the work of a Creator of infinite wisdom and power. Our clearer conception of the universal prevalence of order and law throughout the whole universe, and our fuller knowledge of the facts of nature, have assuredly not weakened the force of the old familiar argument from design. On the contrary, we are rather led to see, in the whole of nature, and in the whole course of evolution, the working out of one great purpose, the manifestation of the living God.

But if we find Him "in the shining of His stars," if we mark Him "in the flowering of His fields,"[1] surely we may reasonably hope that in His "ways with man," we shall find Him most of all. If the cause of religion has really nothing to fear from the growth of natural science, it is not likely it will be seriously weakened by any advances that may be made in the scientific study of history. In spite of all that has been said about the results of historical science in general, and about the study of comparative theology in particular, there can be no doubt that it is from these studies that the truth of the Christian religion must receive its strongest confirmation, and that it is the knowledge derived from such researches which must, more than anything else, bring home to the world a living sense of the true glory and divinity of Christ.

The natural tendency to progress; the fact that there are certain laws of human nature, in accordance with

[1] Tennyson, "Passing of Arthur."

which society tends to advance in knowledge, to attain a higher view of human life, to set up a more exalted standard of character, and to aim at a more perfect state of society, is the most convincing of all the instances of design or of a divine purpose working in the world which can possibly be adduced, and brings home to our hearts the conviction that men are indeed children of the living God, and are being trained by their Heavenly Father for the inheritance of a heavenly kingdom; and, since the religion of Christ has been the means by which the fulfilment of this design has been rendered possible, we cannot but acknowledge that we have convincing proof that Christ "came forth from God to be the Saviour of the world."

Again, one important result of the modern historical science is this, that we have learned to take very wide views of things, to deal with great periods of time and widely extended regions, and to regard the history of mankind in general as one rounded whole. Now, nothing tends to bring out more clearly the unique significance and essential greatness of Christianity than this method of dealing with history. Christianity is never seen to be so truly great as when it is considered, not as an isolated fact, but as something to be viewed in connexion with the whole course of history.

That some curious coincidences may be traced between some ideas or some stories which we had supposed to be peculiar to the Christian revelation, and ideas or legends connected with other forms of religion, as, *e. g.*, between the story of Moses exposed in the ark of bulrushes and very similar stories told of other heroes and deliverers, may

strike us as a perplexing fact. But after all, when we come to think of it, we begin to realize that it is really a fact of very small importance. We may examine the alleged coincidence, and decide that the similarity of different stories has been very much exaggerated, or we may find some other explanation of the coincidence; but whatever our decision may be, we cannot fail to realize that these comparatively unimportant matters are after all of little consequence when weighed against the all-important and undeniable fact, that the more we know of all the other forms of religion, which have ever prevailed in the world, the more we feel the infinite superiority of the religion of Christ over them all. Let anyone honestly make the experiment by studying carefully any full account of any non-Christian religious system, and he will surely find that the truth of what has been stated will be brought home to his mind with overwhelming force.

In its lofty conception of the divine nature, in its harmonious blending of the moral and the spiritual, in its adaptation to the wants of men in all times and places, but, above all, in its power to touch the heart and rule the conscience, the religion of Christ stands alone in solitary grandeur, and proclaims itself in the truest sense divine.

A very pronounced unbeliever—Mr. Cotter Morison—declares that, "probably full justice will never be done to the greatness of Christianity until after it has ceased to exist,"[1] and admits that, "it has far surpassed all other religions in its power of keeping up with human evolution."[2] He conceives, indeed, that this is due to the

[1] "Service of Man," ch. vii., p. 173. [2] *Ib.*, ch. viii., p. 256.

large element of Greek philosophy grafted on Christianity by the Greek and Latin Fathers. Even if this latter statement be not somewhat exaggerated, we have still to explain how it came to pass that Christianity had the power to absorb into itself, and give new life and new meaning, to what was best and noblest in Greek philosophy; and no one who considers the matter thoughtfully can fail to be convinced that the only satisfactory explanation is, that the religion of Christ was a seed of new and divine life cast into the fertile soil of human nature, which assimilated to itself, and clothed with new life and a new beauty, whatever was best and truest in the Old World.

Bishop Butler compared the Christian revelation to a valuable medicine or other natural product discovered, as it were, by chance at some particular time and place, after it had long remained unknown. As an answer to the objection with which Butler was dealing, the comparison must be pronounced to be quite satisfactory. When, with the fuller knowledge available in the present day, we study the history of the origin of Christianity in connexion with what went before, and with what has followed after; when we perceive how Christianity appeared when men had reached a certain high stage of culture, and when a long period of upward striving after truth and knowledge had so trained and disciplined their minds and characters that they could value its teaching and understand its meaning; when we consider how it has since made way, and been adopted by those who are confessedly the most enlightened nations of the world; when these and other facts of like nature are duly weighed, we

cannot but feel that we may, with more truth and justice, compare the work of God in the Christian revelation to the action of a wise physician, who, having in his hands a medicine which he knows will infallibly cure the disease of a patient under his care, yet withholds the knowledge from the sick man until the precise moment has arrived when the medicine can be applied so as to produce the desired effect.

In the ancient world many nations who were not of the Aryan race[1] succeeded in reaching a high level of civilization; so that we cannot admit, that the capacity for civilization and the tendency to progress are peculiar to the Aryan races.

Do not the facts with which we have been dealing suggest reasons for renewed confidence in the world-wide spread of the Gospel? Even now, some Eastern races, who have long remained stagnant and unprogressive, are beginning to feel the influence of Western civilization. Must we not feel convinced that it is the divine purpose that, little by little, all the nations of the earth shall take their stand in the ranks of the great army of progressive humanity, and that as they do so, they will thankfully acknowledge the power of the Gospel of Christ to satisfy their spiritual wants, and give them strength and courage for the conflict?

These considerations will enable us to see how utterly baseless is the objection of Mr. Leslie Stephen, that a belief in the supernatural reduces history to a chaos because "it compels men, instead of holding by the

[1] *E.g.*, the Babylonians, the Egyptians, and the Phœnicians.

continuity and uniformity of nature, to accept a dualism which implies catastrophe and the interference of a radically unknowable factor."[1]

Even if the interference of the Deity in the affairs of the world in the manner which we call supernatural were a thing of frequent occurrence, it is hard to see why that fact should "reduce history to a chaos," or in any way interfere with our knowledge of the general scheme of things lying outside the sphere of such interference. The frequent and often incalculable interference of man with the course of nature does not in the least interfere with the successful pursuit of natural science. The fact that once in a way the proverbial rich uncle does come home from the colonies in the most unexpected manner to share his wealth with his needy relatives does not by any means render it absolutely impossible for poor and struggling people in general to act with wise deliberation in the conduct of their affairs, and ought not to blind them to the fact that it is their duty to use ordinary prudence and foresight in providing for their wants.

But since, as a matter of fact, we know that this system of frequent supernatural interference is not by any means the system which prevails in this world, we feel that it is reasonable to ask that very special reasons should be given for any alleged manifestation of the supernatural, and that such supernatural manifestation should be justified by the importance of its results.

It cannot be denied that this is so in the case of the Christian revelation; and it seems strange that writers of

[1] "An Agnostic's Apology," &c., p. 82.

such intellectual power, and differing so widely in opinion, as Professor Huxley, Mr. Leslie Stephen, and the late Cardinal Newman, should unite in ridiculing the opinion expressed by Archbishop Whately that, while the miracles recorded in the New Testament would stand the test of the strictest investigation, the mediæval miracles, and the accounts of supernatural manifestations, which have come down to us from Pagan antiquity, would all be found to be baseless illusions. Archbishop Whately may not have realized the difficulty of dealing with the somewhat perplexing evidence which exists for some of the so-called ecclesiastical miracles, or of showing the difference between that evidence and the evidence for the Gospel miracles. But surely, as a conclusion from general principles, his opinion on this subject was worthy of his sound judgment and masculine common sense.

The resurrection of Christ, and the reality of the manifestations of his divine power in his miracles of healing, as recorded in the Gospels, are worthy of credence, because the life of Christ has produced far-reaching and abiding results of infinite importance in the history of the world. The stories of miracles and wonders which have come down to us from the semi-barbarous and uncritical period of the middle ages, miracles and wonders which were accompanied by no circumstances of the smallest importance, and which never led to anything, are no more worthy of the serious attention of any sensible man than the absurdities of modern spiritualism.

The religion of Christ claims to be a new creation—the introduction of a new life, a new power, into the world. It must therefore be considered as a phenomenon

analogous to the first introduction of organic life on the earth.

We should not find any difficulty in believing, if it could be proved, that the unexplained appearance of organic life only took place once, and at one particular place. Neither should the fact that a special divine revelation was only given at one particular time, and to a limited number of people, present any difficulty to our minds.

The fact that the first appearance of organic life cannot be explained as the result of anything that went before does not introduce any element of chaos into natural science. Neither does the fact that the origin of Christianity cannot be explained as the result of natural causes introduce any element of chaos into history.

The phenomena of the spiritual life may not be so clearly marked off, nor so easy to be distinguished, as are those of the organic world. Nevertheless, the deep spirit of earnestness which Christianity has breathed into the life of the world, the power which it has manifested to renew and sanctify the hearts of man, the impulse which it has given to the progress of humanity, all proclaim that the spiritual life is a great reality.

Let us seek to realize the power and reality of that divine and spiritual life in our own personal experience, so shall we have a deeper, truer, more living conviction of the divine truth of Christianity than can ever be gained by mere trains of reasoning or by arguments drawn from the world of nature, or from the history of mankind, a conviction which will give us strength in every hour of temptation, and will bring us perfect and abiding peace amidst all the troubles and conflicts of our earthly lives.

LECTURE VI.

THE DIVINE AND THE SUPERNATURAL.

St. John, xiv. 6.

"I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me."

THE minds of men are so differently constituted that arguments which will fully convince one man of the truth of any proposition will often have no weight whatever with another. For this reason the Christian apologist ought never to abandon hastily any valid line of defence, which may serve to establish the truth of Divine Revelation.

The fact that St. Paul had evidently examined with care the evidence available in his day for the truth of Christ's Resurrection, and the calm and sober statement of an important part of that evidence contained in the fifteenth chapter of the First Epistle to the Corinthians, must ever be felt by serious people to constitute a very powerful argument for the truth of that all-important article of the Faith.

"If the case rested on this only, and terminated here," writes Mr. W. R. Greg, in his "Creed of Christendom," "everyone would feel that our grounds for accepting the Resurrection as an historical fact in its naked simplicity would appear to be nearly unassailable and irresistible, except for those who can imagine some probable mode in which such a positive and vivifying conviction could have grown up without the actual occurrence having taken place to create it."[1]

It is probable, however, that, with the majority of thinking people in the present day, considerations derived from the nature of Christianity itself, from the unique position which the Christian religion has occupied in the history of the world, and from the powerful influence which Christ has exercised over the lives of men, are those which will have the greatest force in assuring them of the divine truth of Christianity, and that it is such considerations which will enable them to estimate at its true value the positive evidence for the truth of the historical facts on which the Christian religion is founded.

It may be objected, however, that, although such considerations may tend to produce a conviction that Christianity is in some sense divine, they will not serve to re-establish or restore the decaying faith of the world in the alleged supernatural events which have hitherto been so intimately associated with the idea of Christianity. That Christianity is divine does not, it may be said, necessarily mean that it is supernatural.

It may be admitted that Agnosticism, pure and simple,

[1] "Creed of Christendom," 7th ed., vol. i., Pref. xxvii.

will never satisfy the needs of the human mind or human heart; but that the real tendency of modern thought is towards a fuller and more sincere recognition of the reality of the divine and eternal as a great and awful, if mysterious fact.

The Divine Being may not be very clearly conceived: it may be recognised, in a vague way, as some sort of "Infinite and Eternal Energy, from which all things proceed, and by which they are created and sustained"[1]; or, more practically, as "something not ourselves, by which we are enabled to fulfil the law of our being .... a great object which cannot be fully grasped in consciousness,"[2] the recognition of which must give a certain completeness to all our knowledge, and impress us with a sense of awe and reverence.

Whether this conviction is likely to do much practical good, or to make men any better or happier, may, perhaps, appear exceedingly doubtful; but, at all events, it is something that such a belief in the eternal and divine should be the natural result of advancing knowledge and wider culture.

But if we accept either of the definitions now quoted, it follows, of necessity, that Christianity must be regarded as divine in the truest sense of the word: for Christianity has certainly been a great power in the world, sustaining and building up the world's highest life, and enabling the most perfect of God's creatures—man—to fulfil the true law of his being. Whatever God may be, however vague our conception of His being, if the being of God is

[1] Herbert Spencer. [2] Matthew Arnold, "Literature and Dogma."

admitted in any sense, it becomes an unquestionable matter of fact that Christ came forth from God, in a very special sense, to save and bless the world.

We may, perhaps, be told that this conviction must abide and remain—that fuller knowledge and deeper experience will only serve to bring home to men's minds a more living sense of the true greatness of Christianity—even though the origin and growth of the Christian religion may be fully accounted for by the action of purely natural forces, working in accordance with the ordinary laws of human nature.

In point of fact, it may be said, the more clearly we realize that the course of the world was so ordered as to produce in the natural course of things so great and precious a thing as the Christian religion, the more fully shall we be enabled to see in that religion the grandest and most perfect manifestation of the Divine Idea.

According to this view, Jesus of Nazareth, the great Jewish prophet and reformer, was probably one of the greatest and best of the many great and good men who have given their lives to the service of humanity. Certainly no other great and good man has ever succeeded in making his influence so widely and so deeply felt. The enthusiasm inspired by His holy life, His wonderful and striking personality, His spiritual teaching, and His tragic death, together with the singular belief in His resurrection from the dead which, somehow or other, gained currency amongst His immediate followers, tended to attract great multitudes to His cause.

Thus it came to pass that His teaching and the story of His life became, as it were, the nucleus around which all

the noble ideas, all the holy aspirations, all the forces working for good in the world were, little by little, gathered together, and took definite shape and form, under the favouring circumstances of the early Roman empire. It was inevitable that all those religious ideas and forces for good should combine under some form or other; and there is nothing remarkable in the fact that they did so under the powerful influence of the enthusiasm inspired by the personality of the Galilean prophet.

Nor is there anything at all remarkable in the fact that the simple and imaginative people amongst whom Jesus lived and taught, and who were His earliest disciples, should have expressed the singular glory and majesty of His holy life, as we may say, in terms of the supernatural; that one whom His followers could never fully understand, but whom they felt to be so very great and high, came to be regarded as some sort of mysterious supernatural Being, living a mysterious life in an atmosphere of mystery and wonder; that one who exercised a strange magnetic power over men's minds, and who was able to touch the deepest chords of the human heart, came to be regarded as a miracle-worker, the performer of all sorts of fantastic wonders. All this was the most natural thing in the world, and so, no one need have any hesitation or feel any difficulty in regarding the stories of Christ's supernatural birth, of His miracles, of His resurrection from the dead, as also the doctrines about His nature and person which have commonly been accepted in the Church as mere harmless illusions.

Nor is it necessary, on this hypothesis, to face the difficulty that God, supposed to be a God of truth, should

have made use of falsehood and illusion to fulfil His divine purpose (even if such an idea could present any difficulty to the mind of a cultured and enlightened person) for it is easy to see that the illusions with which we are now dealing were not really any part of the divine manifestation.

What was really divine and from God was the spiritual truth which Christ taught, as also the example of Christ's holy life. The stories of miracle and wonder, and the doctrines founded upon those stories, can only be regarded as a kind of poetic form under which the divine truths were conceived in the human mind—a sort of outer garment, woven and fashioned by men for the clothing of the divine idea. Now that the world has outgrown its childhood, and men can no longer believe in fairy tales, we may relinquish, perhaps not without a sigh or a tear, but at all events without anxiety or hesitation, all the beautiful illusions, knowing that the essential part of Christianity—that which was really from God—can never perish, and that the impulse which Christ gave to the higher life of the world can never be checked in its onward progress.

Probably the fullest and ablest exposition of the views which have now been stated, which has appeared in recent years, is to be found in Mr. Matthew Arnold's work, "Literature and Dogma," which was first published twenty years ago. Within the last few years, however, the fundamental ideas of "Literature and Dogma" have been presented to the world in more popular form in the novels of Matthew Arnold's gifted niece, Mrs. Humphrey Ward. It is probable that the great popularity which

those novels have enjoyed is due, quite as much to the fact that they seem to suggest a form of positive faith likely to afford relief from the pressure of doubts and difficulties which are very widely experienced as to their literary power and charms of style.

It is something to be thankful for, that those who do not accept the truths of revealed religion should yet come to recognise the value and importance of Christianity as a rule of life and guide of conduct, especially when they are ready to acknowledge, as Matthew Arnold distinctly acknowledges, that the Christian ideal of character is not only very high, but that it is the highest conceivable, and must be considered as absolutely perfect.[1] At the same time, it may be confidently asserted that those who expect that this system of non-miraculous Christianity will ever afford a secure resting-place and a permanent form of religious belief suited to the needs of the modern world have not by any means got rid of childish illusions or idle dreams.

This view of Christ's life and work looks plausible enough when stated in broad and general terms; but when subjected to the test of a careful and searching examination, it will be found to be beset by so many and such almost insuperable difficulties, that it can hardly be doubted that the common sense of mankind will be compelled to decide that, if Christ is to be accepted as divine in any real sense, or, in fact, if men are to have any definite idea of Him at all, they must accept the general

[1] "Literature and Dogma." Popular Edition, Preface: see also ch. xii., § 3.

truthfulness of the presentation of His life and work as given to us in the Gospels, and believe in Him as a supernatural Being.

The real difficulty with which such theories of the origin and growth of Christianity have to contend is, not that it is hard to conceive that God should make use of illusion to fulfil His divine purpose—though probably that is a difficulty which will always have considerable weight with very many people—but, that it is impossible to believe that such great, such permanent, and such far-reaching results should have had their source and origin in a mere illusion—the baseless fancy of a few deluded men.

How was it possible for men, admittedly so far below the level of Jesus, and so incapable of grasping the real meaning of His teaching and His life, men so simple and so much given to illusion, to impress the world so vividly with a living sense of the personality of Jesus, or to present such a picture of Him as is presented in the Gospels?

The Resurrection of Christ was the one great fact of vital importance for the Apostles. If it were not for their belief in the reality of that fact, they would have had no work, no mission, to the world. How did it come to pass that the belief in a mere illusion should have such extraordinary power in the case of men such as they were as to enable them to accomplish a great and abiding work in the world—a work which has profoundly influenced the whole course of history?

The difficulties suggested by such questions as these, when they are honestly and sincerely examined, are so

great, that the conviction must force itself upon the mind of every thoughtful and candid inquirer that, although it may be difficult to believe in the supernatural origin of Christianity, yet to believe that its origin and growth were the result of purely natural causes is simply impossible.

But even if these difficulties could be overcome, and a satisfactory historical account of the origin of Christianity from which every element of the supernatural should have completely disappeared, were forthcoming, although this account might constitute a very valuable and interesting addition to our historical knowledge, it would be very far indeed from affording anything like a practical substitute for our old-fashioned Christianity.

Abstract truth and philosophic theories have never had much power to influence human life. The real secret of the matchless power which Christianity possesses to touch the heart and arouse the moral energies lies just in this fact, that it has taught men to look, not to truth in the abstract, or to the beauty of holiness in the abstract, but to see and feel the power of truth and holiness in the person of a living Saviour. It is because we love and reverence the Lord Jesus, and seek to know and understand Him as a person, that we come to realize the power of "His secret" and His method"—to use the phraseology of Mr. Matthew Arnold—and to appreciate the beauty of His "sweet reasonableness."

Vast numbers of men and women still look up with love and reverence to the Lord Jesus as a living Saviour. The Christian Church still continues to proclaim the living Christ, and to present Him to the world in all the fulness

of His power and love. So long as this continues to be the case, the influence of Christian teaching and Christian modes of thought will be widely and deeply felt in society, even by those who do not profess to be believers in the truth of what is called supernatural Christianity, and the religion of Christ will be a real force restraining the progress of vice and godlessness.

But let us suppose all this to be changed. Let us suppose that the opinions now confined to the comparatively few, and those, for the most part, enlightened and highly-cultivated members of society, become the every-day commonplace beliefs of the world, that our children are taught, as a matter of course, to regard the belief in the incarnation of the Son of God and His resurrection from the dead as an exploded fairy tale, what results are likely to follow from so great a change?

When the Church of Christ has ceased to proclaim the story of Christ's life, as recorded in the Gospels, as the living truth; when with much labour and critical skill all that is true and certain, or even all that is highly probable, shall have been extracted from those scanty memoirs, in which so much that is fanciful and absurd has been mingled with the fine gold of the true life of Jesus, how much will remain? A few discourses, the authenticity of which must always be more or less doubtful; a few short sayings of the highest beauty and deepest significance; a few comparatively uninteresting and unimportant facts; a great and holy personality dimly discerned through the long vista of years, and the mists of idle fancy with which he has been surrounded by His superstitious followers. Who can tell whether He was so

nearly perfect as His followers used to imagine? Who will feel the power of a life which has become so shadowy and unreal?

Even now the Lives of Christ, written by good men, have little power to move us, while the simple words of the old familiar Gospels never fail to touch the deepest chords of our nature. The rationalist of the future, who will compose the ideal Life of Christ which will thrill the whole being and arouse the moral forces into new activity, will assuredly be justly acknowledged to be one of the greatest masters of the art of fiction that the world has ever seen; and yet men will know that it is only fiction after all, and that no living Christ will ever again speak to their hearts in words of comfort and of love.

When men shall have ceased to realize the truth of that life of Christ which brought God so near to man, and manifested, as it was never manifested before, the divine nature in human form, it is certain that the belief in God Himself will rapidly fade away from human consciousness.

Possibly, the philosophical tenet of a personal creator of the world may still be generally accepted by human reason, and a few higher natures may struggle to realize His presence for the fuller satisfaction of their spiritual needs; but, for the great majority of mankind, the Agnostic point of view will alone be possible. No longer will men lift up their heads, bowed down under the weight of earthly sorrow, to a living Heavenly Father; no longer will they breathe their deepest thoughts and most earnest aspirations into a Father's ear. "The great first cause, least understood," will be a strange mysterious

something far off in a Heaven closed for ever to human vision. The ladder set up from earth to Heaven, on which the blessed angels ascended and descended, shall have faded away, as the idle dream it was, and left behind but the cold and desolate earth on which the wanderer must pursue, sadly and alone, his weary pilgrimage.

No one sees all this more clearly than Mr. Matthew Arnold. He satisfies himself that the world cannot do without righteousness, and that Christianity is the only means by which real righteousness can ever be attained; and yet, he calmly assures us, that the one thing which has made Christianity a success, the only thing which is ever likely to ensure its success, is hopelessly doomed to perish.[1]

Mr. Matthew Arnold, of course, contends that what has ensured the success of Christianity in the past is not absolutely necessary for its success in the future; that even though we can no longer have any real idea of Christ as a person, yet the beauty and intrinsic worth of Christ's teaching will remain unchanged.

[1] "Certainly in the Gospels there is plenty of matter to call out our feelings. But, perhaps, this has been somewhat over-used and misused, applied, as it has been, chiefly so as to be subservient to what we call the fairy tale of the three supernatural men, a story which we do not deny to have, like other products of popular imagination, its pathos and power, but which we have seen to be no solid foundation to rest our faith in the Bible on. And perhaps, too, we do wrong, and inevitably fall into what is artificial and unnatural, in labouring so much to produce in ourselves now, as the one impulse determining us to use the method, and secret, and temper of Jesus, that conscious ardent sensation of personal love to Him, which we find the first generation of Christians feeling and professing, and which was the

Love abides for ever. The sense of brotherhood and fellowship, the beauty and nobleness of self-sacrifice for others, the sense of duty, and the love of justice and truth, will abide and be acknowledged as ruling principles in the world. Purity of heart will still be cherished, and add a glory and a beauty, all its own, to human life. Men will cease to repine for what they have lost, and will make the most of those things which remain; and in the fuller lives which they will lead, and with the deeper thoughts and higher culture of the future, these things will have a worth and blessedness never realized before.

Do no uneasy thoughts arise to cloud this bright vision of the future? Is it so perfectly certain that the precious treasure of the Christian ideal of character can never be taken away from mankind?

The moral philosophy of the future may acknowledge the existence of an intuitive moral faculty, as attested by the universal prevalence of the distinctions between right and wrong; but it can hardly be doubted that the utilitarian standard will be adopted as the criterion of what constitutes righteousness or moral conduct.

natural motor for those who were with Him or near Him, and, so to speak, touched him, and in making this our first object. At any rate, misemployed as this motor has often been, it might be well to forego, or at least suspend, its use for ourselves and others for a time, and to fix our minds exclusively on the recommendation given to the method and secret of Jesus *by their being true*, and by the whole course of things proving this."—"Literature and Dogma," ch. xiii., p. 220 (Popular Edition). It is unnecessary to cite passages to show that Matthew Arnold recognised that his system involved disbelief in a *Personal God*, since this may be said to be one of the Fundamental ideas running through this whole book.

The generally accepted standard of conduct is not something fixed and unchangeable. It has varied at different times, and in different places, and, whether a standard is high or low, depends on the general condition, intellectual and moral, of those by whom it is adopted. There may be a perfectly ideal standard existing somewhere in the spiritual world, but that fact cannot have any practical effect, or be of the smallest importance, as regards the affairs of men.

We still bow down before the Christian ideal of character, and, studying it with reverence, recognise that it is highest and best. But if once the feeling of reverence for the person of Christ passes away; if the power of Christ's life and Christ's sufferings ceases to influence and discipline men's lives; if the stern lesson of the Cross loses its living power over our consciences, while at the same time the world grows more wealthy, and men become more self-indulgent: is it likely that the power of seeing and feeling what is really highest and best will remain? One rule after another will be questioned; and while the mere habit of questioning the validity of rules of duty must infallibly weaken the hold of such rules in general upon the conscience, men whose senses have become dulled by self-indulgence and intense absorption in earthly things, will be surprised to find how hard it has become for them to give definite reasons in justification of rules of conduct which are now accepted as amongst the first principles of morality, and acknowledged as of divine authority.

Even now there is a very strong tendency, in society, to accept a standard of purity lower and less rigid than the

ideal standard of Christianity; while, in the commercial world, it is found exceedingly difficult to carry out the rigid principles of truth and justice inculcated in the New Testament, and it is almost looked upon as a matter of course that certain lower codes of justice and fair dealing should be accepted to meet the requirements of practical life. If this is so, what would be likely to be the result if the world and society should become our all in all, and the restraining influence of the lofty Christian standard of life and conduct were to be taken away?

If, again, the self-sacrifice of Christ ceases to be a living power over human life, can we hope that the spirit of self-sacrificing love to one's fellow men will continue to exist, much less to be a common thing in the world? Men will, no doubt, always love their children and their homes; and a certain lazy kindliness, inclining men to do what is friendly and good-natured, so long as it involves no great trouble or self-denial, may be common enough; but we cannot but fear that the deeper spirit of self-sacrificing love, the earnest sympathy with our fellows, so characteristic of Christianity, will pass away, never to return. And if an exalted morality and a high ideal of character decay, and give place to lower and more ignoble views, can we even hope that "knowledge will grow from more to more"?

"It is not impossible, perhaps," writes Mr. Leslie Stephen, "though I certainly do not think it probable, that the creed of the future may flatter the natural weakness of mankind by gradually diminishing the interest in scientific inquiry. Popular writers are fond of describing Utopias in which man's power over nature

has indefinitely increased, and machinery been applied to hitherto unimaginable results. An imaginative writer might, I fancy, employ himself to equally good purpose in describing a state of things in which some mechanical discoveries should remain, but serve only as a memorial of a distant past, their principles forgotten, their use only known by tradition, in which the power of discovery should have perished, and a steam-engine be the object of superstitious reverence—like a gun in the hands of a savage—as a mysterious survival from the days of the ancient demi-gods."[1]

But surely it is not religion, as Mr. Leslie Stephen suggests, but rather the absence of religion, which would be most likely to "emasculate the intellect," and lead to such deplorable results as are described in this passage.

Modern science has grown up and reached its present state of perfection under the influence of the Christian religion and the Christian spirit, and it is hard to estimate, fully and justly, the greatness of the debt which science owes to that influence and that spirit. The humility which teaches us that "to enter into the kingdom of nature as into the kingdom of God, it is necessary to become as little children"; the unwearied patience, the deep earnestness, the sincere love of truth, the faith in the value of the results to be gained by careful investigation: to all these things the triumph of modern science may be ascribed, and all these, it is evident, have their source and origin in the teaching of Christ.

Realizing this, and knowing the seeds of corruption at

[1] "An Agnostic's Apology," &c., vii., p., 373.

work in modern society, we cannot but feel that that "reeling back into the beast," that "degeneracy to primitive bestial condition," of which some writers have spoken, is not in itself so great an impossibility as we might at first sight imagine.

It is only too easy to conceive the possibility of a state of things in which men, retaining no more of the ancient philosophy than the belief that "He that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow," shall cast knowledge, science, and philosophy to the winds as useless disturbers of the peace of mankind, and gradually drift back into a barbarism like that of their primitive forefathers, only darker and more hopeless, just because the fall has been from so great and fair a height.

Having attempted, in former lectures, to form some estimate of the nature and extent of the influence which Christianity has exercised in the past, and which it still exercises in the affairs of the world, and having dealt with the connexion between the Christian religion and the progress of civilization, it must be admitted that it is perfectly just and reasonable to consider what results would be likely to follow if so great and important a factor as Christianity were to be removed from our social life. And, although in such subjects great accuracy of prediction is not to be expected, it ought to be possible, with our present knowledge, to form a general idea of the probable course of events; and even though it may be thought that the fancy picture which has just been sketched has been painted in colours altogether too dark and gloomy, yet it is probable that no one who is really competent to form a sound judgment, and who takes

account of the forces tending to corruption and decay at work in the heart of society, can doubt that, with the decay of the Christian faith—the only form of faith which has any chance of retaining its hold upon the world—the cause of civilization would receive a crushing blow, and be seriously, if not hopelessly, checked in its onward progress.

It is obviously neither fair nor just to characterize any honest attempt to point out such dangers as a cowardly and puerile effort to frighten men into accepting, or pretending to accept, a superstition which must be rejected by reason and common sense. Such an accusation might be true if there were no positive evidence for the truth of Christianity. But, at all events, if, as Mr. Matthew Arnold asserts, the truth of non-miraculous Christianity can be verified, in the only way in which such things can be verified, by showing that it is absolutely necessary for the well-being of man, and even for the very existence of society, it is surely fair to show that the truth of revealed religion is verified by the same line of argument.

To show that, if a column in some beautiful building, which had been supposed to be a mere ornament—an ornament perhaps not in the most perfect taste—were taken away, the whole building would speedily collapse, is a fair and logical way of proving that the column in question formed an important part of the design of the original architect. But, "the foundation of God standeth sure,"[1] and the Christian knows that he need never look forward with fear and anxiety to the unknown future.

[1] 2 Tim. ii. 19.

On the contrary, if he is true to the faith which he professes, no one has so much cause for trust and confidence—

> "The One remains, the many change and pass;
> Heaven's light for ever shines: earth's shadows fly."

To the Christian, the Kingdom of God is no dream or vision—no shadowy unreal thing—but an actual present fact. Amidst all the strife and confusion of the world he is enabled to discern the "surpassing beauty and majesty of that Eternal Kingdom." That "the Most High ruleth in the kingdoms of men"[1] is, for the Christian, the most certain of all truths—the presence of the living Christ the most real of all realities.

If the Christian studies with earnestness and patience the history of the past; if he takes a living interest in the affairs of the world in the present, it is because he knows and feels that the world is God's world, and its history the manifestation of the divine will. He who looks only at the things which are seen must often be oppressed with the saddening thought that this world is "a poor thing at its best"—an empty, unreal thing—the passing scene of petty and fruitless struggles—a vain and troubled dream. But, amidst all the sin and sorrow, amidst all the strife and confusion, the Christian is enabled to discern the working out of the divine purpose, and to realize something of the greatness and majesty of the Divine Kingdom which shall be revealed in perfect beauty and surpassing glory in eternity.

[1] Dan. iv. 25.

LECTURE VII.

THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD.

St. Matth. v. 20.

"Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven."

IT would be a great mistake to attempt to find a parallel for this utterance of our Blessed Lord in such sayings as "Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy,"[1] or in any of the many passages in the Gospels in which the sins and shortcomings of the scribes and Pharisees are exposed and condemned. In the Sermon on the Mount our Lord deals, not with the lives and character of the scribes and Pharisees, not with the kind of righteousness which they practised, but with the righteousness which they taught, *i. e.* with the rules which they laid down for the guidance of those who received their instruction—the standard of righteousness and obedience which had received their formal and authoritative sanction. The words of the text do not stand by themselves, having no

[1] St. Luke, xii. 1.

connexion with anything which has gone before or which follows after. They lay down a broad, general principle, the meaning and application of which are very fully exemplified in detail in a number of important instances, as our Lord passes in review, one after another, the various rules laid down by "them of old time"—rules which formed an important part of the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees—and shows in what respects the righteousness of His kingdom implies a deeper, broader, and more perfect rule of duty. We are so much accustomed, however, to associate with the words "scribe" and "Pharisee" ideas which are altogether hateful and repulsive that these words only suggest to our minds those vices and sins, those darker features of the character and conduct of the Jewish leaders and teachers, which are so forcibly denounced in the Gospels. We think of the scribes and Pharisees only as cruel oppressors of the poor, as men full of covetousness and hypocrisy, utterly worldly and selfish, and substituting for true religion a dead and profitless formalism.

This being so, even though we may be ready to acknowledge, in words, that the rule of life laid down by the scribes and Pharisees may have been very good and admirable, even though the scribes and Pharisees themselves were by no means faithful in its observance, though we may admit that it was quite natural that teachers and leaders of thought should "lay on men burdens grievous to be borne," which they themselves were unwilling to touch with "one of their fingers"[1]

[1] St. Luke, xi. 46.

yet we cannot easily get rid of the idea that the law of righteousness inculcated by the scribes and Pharisees must have been so deeply impregnated with their spirit, so much tainted with their faults, as to be utterly hateful in itself and essentially displeasing to God. Our Lord's words, as recorded in the text, must have seemed very strange and startling to those who first heard them, but we find it hard to think of them as more than the expression of a mere truism. For this reason, perhaps, we often fail to grasp the true meaning of the passage or to understand the real importance of the principle here enunciated.

In the first place, we must remember that the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees was founded on the Divine Law of the Pentateuch, which was regarded by all sects and parties amongst the Jews as the one supreme and infallible authority on all matters relating to life and conduct. Nor were the rules and traditions of the scribes framed with any desire to lighten the burden imposed by the law, or to lay down a less rigid and exacting rule of religious obedience. On the contrary, we cannot but feel that those rules and traditions were the outcome of an honest and sincere, if sometimes puerile, attempt to apply the principles of the Divine Law to practice, and by excessive strictness and caution in guarding against the possibility of any approach to a violation of the law, to furnish a rule of life which should ensure the perfect safety of the zealous and God-fearing Jew.[1] It

[1] The expression, "putting a hedge round the law," was commonly used in the Jewish schools for the practice of laying down rules in doubtful cases, where there was no direct command in the Divine

would be a great mistake, therefore, to suppose that the principles of righteousness taught by the scribes and Pharisees were in any real sense principles of unrighteousness.

Even if there were no fairer side to the lives of the scribes and Pharisees than that which comes so prominently under our notice in the Gospels, even if there were amongst them no faithful and earnest men, who sought in all sincerity to live up to the traditions and principles of earlier and purer days, yet we must remember that the righteousness here spoken of by our Blessed Lord was no new invention—the work of the scribes and Pharisees of New Testament times—but a sacred deposit handed down from earlier days, and having as its centre and foundation the Sacred and Divine Law.

In the next place, we must notice that our Blessed Lord does not really condemn or set aside the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees. On the contrary, the whole of the earlier portion of the Sermon on the Mount shows that He considered that that righteousness was good and right so far as it went, only that it did not go far enough for the children of the Kingdom of Heaven.

Our Lord does not set aside the old commands, "Thou shalt not kill," "Thou shalt not commit adultery."[1] Those commands must be for ever binding. He only shows that in the Kingdom of Heaven, just because it is the Kingdom of Heaven and of God, the Kingdom in

Law, or where it was thought advisable to forbid things not absolutely unlawful in themselves, to prevent the possibility of doing anything which might *lead* to the violation of the law.

[1] St. Matth. v. 21, 27 and *sqq.*

which the Judge and Ruler is the Eternal God, who searches and tries the hearts of men, it is not enough to conform outwardly to the command—to avoid those external acts which are forbidden by the law—but that the heart and soul must be pure and free from evil, and that account must be taken of the inmost thoughts and most secret springs of action.

Nor does our Lord condemn the religious practices of fasting, alms-giving, and prayer,[1] which were inculcated by the scribes and Pharisees. He points out the dangers connected with such practices, so long as they are carried on merely as acts of obedience to external rules, but shows how for the child of the kingdom, who realizes continually the presence of the Heavenly Father, "who seeth in secret," these practices become something much more real and more deeply significant than they could ever be for the mere follower of the scribes and Pharisees.

It may, perhaps, be thought that we have to face a more serious difficulty when we come to deal with that part of the Sermon on the Mount, in which our Blessed Lord deals with the law of divorce, and the stern *Lex Talionis*—the Mosaic Law, "An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth." In these cases He seems to condemn altogether the commandments of the old law, and to substitute for them precepts which are their direct contradictories. A little careful reflection will, however, enable us to see that the contradiction is more apparent than real; that these laws of the old dispensation are to be regarded as negative rather than positive, as wholesome

[1] St. Matth. vi. 1 and *sqq.*

restraints on excessive indulgence or excessive vengeance rather than as positive sanctions of the practices which they permit.[1]

In the *Lex Talionis* and the Jewish law of divorce, we recognise, in fact, cases of that kind of compromise—that accommodation to the actual state of society and the practical necessities of life—which must always characterize practical legislation in this world. Our Lord's teaching is evidently conceived in the same spirit as the original legislation, but He goes farther and deeper, and lays down a rule which is absolutely perfect.

In the Kingdom of Heaven, because it is the kingdom of a perfect and holy God, there is no room for compromise; there can be no stopping half way; as the Kingdom of God claims the service of the whole heart and the whole life, so also it demands a service which shall be absolutely perfect, as the only service which can be wholly pleasing to God. "Be ye therefore perfect, as your Heavenly Father is perfect"[2] is the conclusion of the whole matter, the summary of all our Lord's comments on the teaching of the Mosaic Law.

Bearing these considerations in mind, we can scarcely fail to recognise that the words, "Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the Kingdom of Heaven," are not to be regarded merely as a criticism upon an obsolete system of law and morals, which has long ago ceased to be of the smallest interest to anyone, but that, on the contrary, they enunciate a principle of

[1] See Appendix, p. 211

[2] St. Matth. v. 48.

the greatest importance and deepest significance for our own, and indeed for all time. We feel that the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees is not to be considered as something entirely *sui generis*, but is rather to be looked upon as a type of law in general, or, to be more strictly accurate, of law as laid down by external authority for sake of the well-being of society or of the world.[1]

For us, then, the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees comes to mean the law with which we ourselves have to do, the law as we find it prevailing in the world around us, whether the ordinary law of the land, or the unwritten code of the society in which we move.

The teaching of that part of the Sermon on the Mount with which we have been dealing must be considered as our Lord's own answer to that question which has been a cause of such sore perplexity and anxiety to many devout and earnest souls. How, and to what extent, ought the life of the true child of God's Kingdom to differ from that of the mere man of the world?—a question which naturally claims to be considered in any inquiry concerning the work of Christ in the world.

[1] The Law of Moses does indeed contain spiritual elements. In the Book of Deuteronomy, especially, there is much deep spiritual teaching, and due prominence is given to the claims of the inner life. This indeed is acknowledged in the Sermon on the Mount (see St. Matth. v. 16, 17, 18, 19, and vii. 12.

But, at the same time, the Mosaic Law was necessarily adapted to the needs of an earthly community. Consequently, it gives special prominence to mere rules and laws, and is obliged, to a certain extent, to find room for compromise. In the system of the scribes and Pharisees, only what may be called the external side of the law appears, and all their rules and precepts were directed to the ordering of the outer life.

Probably the great majority of those who heard these words when they were first uttered had been accustomed to think of the system of rules and laws, which constituted the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, as the highest conceivable embodiment of divine and heavenly wisdom, a little too rigid and exacting, perhaps, in its demands, and erring, if it erred at all, rather by excess than by defect, but certainly not admitting of any doubt as to its sufficiency or completeness. These, no doubt, listened with scornful incredulity to the suggestion that there might be a higher or better rule of righteousness than that which they had been accustomed to reverence. But we can hardly doubt that there were many amongst the multitudes gathered together to listen to the Lord's teaching in whose souls these words awoke a responsive echo, and who felt that this saying expressed a thought which had long been struggling to find utterance in the depths of their own hearts; for we may be sure that there were many who, in spite of all the minute and rigid rules, the many "burdens grievous to be borne," of the legal system, found it impossible to be satisfied, or at peace in their souls, and were eagerly asking, What more does God require? What hard thing shall we do? What great service shall we render, that we may become acceptable in God's sight, and find that rest and assurance of safety which are not to be found in obedience to the law laid down by the scribes and Pharisees?

In every age such questions as these have agitated the minds of devout and earnest men and women. In every age those who have been sincerely in earnest about

spiritual things have felt that the service of God ought to involve something more, something deeper, than a mere conformity to the ordinary laws and rules of society, though they have not at all times found it easy to determine wherein the difference should consist.

Strange, indeed, have been the ways in which earnest men, longing above all things for peace with God, and the assurance of salvation, have tried to attain to a righteousness higher and more perfect than the righteousness of the world. Men have inflicted upon their bodies useless and degrading tortures, have sternly denied themselves everything that could make life worth having, have willingly adopted the strangest and most outlandish customs in the vain hope of thus finding blessedness and peace. The misery and wretchedness of the lives of the early African hermits, the absurd austerities of the pillar-saints, the degrading and useless penances and self-tortures with which the Lives of the mediæval saints abound, revolting and degrading as these things must seem to us, they yet bear witness to the intense earnestness with which men have given themselves to what they believed to be pleasing to God, and show how willing men have been to accept the teaching, "Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the Kingdom of Heaven."

When we come to deal with the modern period, the extravagant asceticism of the Middle Ages, no doubt, disappears; but yet, in the history of the sects which arose at the Reformation period, and in that of many sects and parties down to our own day, we cannot fail to

recognise the presence of the same spirit of misdirected earnestness—the same readiness to do strange and fantastic things, simply for the sake of appearing to be separate from the world—the same willingness to submit cheerfully to rigid and stern, but often wholly useless rules of life and conduct in the hope of pleasing God, and finding acceptance with Him. But although a history of fanaticism—a history of what men have done and suffered under the influence of false views of God and of religion—might be exceedingly interesting and in many respects far from unprofitable, yet we cannot but feel that it would of necessity be, above all things else, a painful and depressing record; for we could never get rid of the thought, What was the profit of all this painful self-denial, of all this devotion to strange and unusual practices? What end did it serve? In what one way did it tend to the glory of God or the service of mankind?

Thus, then, we are brought face to face with the practical difficulty, which has often been a cause of sore trouble and perplexity to sincere and earnest Christians. On the one hand, it does not seem possible to lead a life different from that prescribed by the ordinary usages of society in any other way than by doing something unusual or fantastic; while, on the other hand, we cannot fail to see clearly that to do anything unusual or fantastic, merely because it is unusual or fantastic, cannot possibly serve any good end, or in any way promote the good of mankind.

Fortunately for us, when we turn back to the Lord's own words, we find, if we give them our earnest attention, a complete and satisfactory solution of all our

difficulties, a solution so simple, and yet at the same time so satisfying, that it comes home to our souls with living power, and proclaims itself indeed a true word of God.

The difference between the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees (so our Lord teaches us), and the righteousness of the Kingdom of Heaven, consists, not so much in the things done, as in the spirit in which they are done; but yet the fact that the child of the kingdom works on wholly different principles, and in a different spirit from the mere man of the world—the disciple of the scribes and Pharisees—makes all the difference in the world in the character of the righteousness even in those cases in which there is no difference worth speaking of in the actions in which these different kinds of righteousness are manifested.

The man of the world recognises no law but the law of society. Society—the world in which he lives—is his all-in-all. Whatever society bids him do, he does, just because society bids him. Whatever society condemns, he condemns. In a word, the world is his master and lawgiver, and so long as he stands well with the world, his mind is at rest.

The fanatic, on the other hand, regards society as his natural enemy. If no reason can be alleged in justification of any custom but that it has been sanctioned by society, that is quite enough to make the fanatic reject that custom, and denounce it with all his soul. If a rule on some unimportant matter is laid down by society, and rests on no other authority, that is quite sufficient reason for the fanatic why he should break that rule on every possible occasion.

Very different from this is the attitude of the true Christian. He regards the world in which he lives neither as his natural lord and master to be implicitly obeyed in all things and on all occasions, nor yet as a natural enemy to which he must be in constant, anxious, and irritating opposition. So long as the rules and customs sanctioned by society and approved of in the world are innocent and harmless in themselves, the Christian will feel it his duty to obey and conform to them, partly because he feels that he ought to do everything in his power to bind himself more closely in social union to his fellows, and to promote the peaceful and harmonious working of society, partly because the true follower of Christ hates any needless display and ostentation, and loves to pass quietly and unobtrusively through the world.

When, as must always be the case to a very considerable extent, the laws and customs of society sanction what is good and right in itself, the Christian will thankfully acknowledge the fact, and no anxious doubts will trouble his soul as to whether he is not in danger of sinful conformity to the world. But if some "parting of the ways" is reached when the customs sanctioned and approved of by society are in opposition to the spirit and teaching of Christ; if the Christian finds himself in an ungodly society, in which things hateful to God and contrary to the Spirit of the kingdom of heaven are approved of, while true righteousness is hated and persecuted; or if he realizes, as he gains fuller knowledge and clearer spiritual vision, that old customs long approved of in the world, simply because the world had not taken the

trouble to question their character, are wrong and must be strenuously opposed: then, without fear and without hesitation, the Christian chooses the higher and better way unmoved by the world's scorn and contempt, unshaken by the world's hatred and opposition.

In the highest sense the true Christian is wholly indifferent to the verdict of the world because his life is ruled by a standard entirely different—different not merely in degree but in kind—from that of the world or of society. His righteousness is a different kind of righteousness.

The scribes and Pharisees can only deal with man's outer life, can only lay down laws to regulate men's actions; they have no concern with the inner life or the hidden springs of character and conduct. The world legislates for its own comfort and protection, says, Do this, for it is necessary for the welfare of society; avoid that, for it is injurious; and so long as a man's actions conform to these external rules the world can find no fault, even though the inner life of his soul may be utterly vile and hateful. In a world of imperfect human beings, too, in which it is often impossible to enforce the standard of conduct which is felt to be highest and best, it is inevitable that the accepted rules and laws should often be of the nature of compromises—not the best conceivable, but only the best possible or attainable under the circumstances.

To enter into the kingdom of heaven is to pass from this world of outward things and imperfect legislation into a higher and more perfect sphere—a world of eternal truths and spiritual realities—to realize that in that world

we have our true home, and that it alone has a paramount claim on our service. He who enters into the kingdom of heaven feels and knows that the world of spiritual things is the most real world of all, so that at times the lower world almost seems to him a world of visions and of shadows.

To the Christian, as to the prophet of old, the heavens are opened; he sees "the Lord sitting upon His throne high and lifted up, and all the hosts of heaven standing about Him on his right hand and on his left."[1] This world of ours no longer appears as the petty scene of earthly toils and earthly ambitions; but is seen to be part of the one Divine Kingdom in which a divine purpose as yet imperfectly discerned, is being wrought out through all the ages and generations. Men and women take their places amongst the innumerable hosts of heaven, who stand before the Lord waiting upon His commands and fulfilling His divine will.

And, as he lives in the consciousness of God's presence, and his thoughts are constantly occupied with spiritual realities, the Christian learns to attach the place of first and chief importance to all that concerns the inner life of the spirit. The disposition of the heart, the motives from which actions spring, these are felt to be the all-important matters by him who realizes the presence of the Divine and Eternal Judge, the searcher of the thoughts and intents of the heart; and the outward actions seem, in comparison, to be of very secondary importance. Again, he who realizes the divine presence, and occupies himself

[1] 1 Kings, xxii. 19; see also Isaiah, vi. 1.

with the contemplation of spiritual and eternal truth, soon learns to feel that in this Kingdom of Heaven there is no possibility of compromise. He may fail to attain his ideal; he may be sadly conscious that his best service is sin-stained and imperfect; nevertheless, he can never lower the ideal, never rest satisfied with the imperfect service. In the light of the divine presence he has learned to see his true self—what he ought to be—what he was made to be when he was first created in the image and likeness of God—and thenceforward he can never rest, never cease from upward struggling and earnest striving until the heavenly ideal is fully realized.

Thus it is that the religion of Christ has to do with character rather than conduct, while the righteousness of the world is concerned only with the latter.

The law of the heavenly kingdom is a law for the whole spiritual nature, claiming the service of the whole man, purifying and elevating the emotional nature, guiding and directing the thoughts, regulating and controlling the will.

When the character is lofty and Christlike, it follows of necessity that the conduct will be righteous in the truest sense of the word; and for this reason the righteousness of the Kingdom of Heaven is really a simpler and less perplexing thing than the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees. The Christian who truly follows Christ, and, entering into His spirit, sees his own true self as revealed to him in Christ, is not harassed or troubled by numbers of minute and perplexing rules, and does not feel called upon to balance one set of rules, supposed to embody a worldly law of righteousness, with another, and

perhaps conflicting, set of rules, supposed to contain the law of the heavenly kingdom. His actions are the free and spontaneous expressions of his inner nature, and he knows that they must be in accordance with the demands of righteousness and justice—

> "To thine own self be true,
> And it must follow, as the night the day,
> Thou canst not then be false to any man."

In like manner, a right understanding of the nature of the righteousness of the Kingdom of Heaven enables us to see why it is that we hesitate to speak of Christianity as a system intended to promote morality. It is true that Christianity does promote and inculcate true morality, and morality of the highest and most perfect kind; but to say this, is not to state the whole truth. True morality, indeed, takes account of motives and principles as well as of actions; but inasmuch as it it is concerned wholly with our life in the world, and our dealings with our fellows, it is in itself something different from the righteousness of the Kingdom of Heaven.

When morality springs from love to God, and a living sense of His presence and His universal rule; when our duty towards our neighbour is done with joy and gladness as something contained in our duty towards God; then we feel that morality has assumed a new character, and taken on a nobler and more beautiful form, that it can no longer be sufficiently described by a name which belongs to earth and earthly things. The *morality* of the world has been taken up and embraced in the *holiness* of the Kingdom of God. The law of the world or of society can only deal with conduct—with the outer life of man—

yet, nevertheless, it is the inner life of the spirit which is felt to be of real importance and worth, and which really exerts the greatest power, whether for good or evil, in the world and in society. In judging our fellow men, in apportioning praise or blame, it is of character we think rather than of conduct, and the latter is only valued in so far as it is regarded as an index to the former. We feel that we really know other men only as we learn to understand their character and enter into the secret of their inner life. And, as we live in the world and hold intercourse with our fellows, we very speedily discover that we can know much more of others than is to be learned merely from a consideration of their actions; we become conscious of a subtle and all-pervading influence, which comes forth from the inner life of those with whom we have to do, which affects us powerfully, and tends to mould and shape our character whether we will or no—an influence from which it is impossible for any human being wholly to escape.

Since this is so, there can be no doubt that the power of the Christian character of holiness must be one of the most powerful of all the forces which work in the world for the good of mankind and the regeneration of society. As long as the heart of man has power to feel; as long as whatever is beautiful, true, and good, has power to move our souls; as long as our spirits are stirred within us by the power of noble life and lofty ideals: so long must the holiness of the Christian character, as manifested in the lives of gentleness and love, of truth and sincerity, of courage and earnestness, of the true followers of Christ, be a power to raise the world to higher and better life, and

to lead the nations onwards and upwards in the way of true progress—the way that leads to the Eternal City, the perfect kingdom of God.

We look back over the pages of history, and point with just pride to all that the religion of Christ has done in the past for the cause of humanity, and recount its many services in the work of civilization. We look around and see with joy and thankfulness all the great things that are being done in the same cause in the world in which we live, the mighty efforts that are being made in the name of Christ to bring light and knowledge into the dark places of the earth, to reclaim the masses struggling in wretchedness and degradation in the great cities of the world, to instruct the ignorant, to bring comfort and relief to those oppressed with suffering and sorrow.

We take note of the beautiful temples reared to God's honour and glory in every quarter of the Christian world, and the labour devoted to offering in those houses of prayer a worship which may fitly express man's deepest feelings and holiest aspirations. We thankfully acknowledge the earnest and fruitful labours of men of learning who cheerfully devote their lives and the best powers of mind and intellect to the study of those things which relate to Christian life and Christian truth.

All these things may well stir our hearts and inspire us with hope and courage, for all bear witness to the power and glory of the religion of Christ. But even as we think of all these things, we realize that there is something greater and higher still, something which is truly the heart and life, the source and spring of all true service and all faithful work done in the name of Christ,

something, apart from which, such service and such work would have no value, no true meaning. That something is the inner spirit of holiness—the spirit of Christ which breathes through the Christian character, inspiring and adorning it with all the graces and virtues, the beauty and the glory which shine forth in the earnest Christian life.

This is the mighty power which works in the world making its gracious influence felt wherever the name of Christ is named.

Nor is it only where great things are being done and mighty efforts made that this power of the Christian spirit is clearly manifested. But wherever men and women live earnest, faithful, Christlike lives; in quiet homes and peaceful places, where yet, in the small struggles and trials of every-day life, and amidst the calls of common-place duties, abundant opportunity is afforded for the exercise and manifestation of all the virtues and graces of the Christian character—the spirit of gentleness and patience, of earnestness and sincerity, of true courage and devotion; wheresoever earnest and sincere lives filled with the spirit of gentleness and love shed a soft and gracious influence all around, and make some spot of earth, however small or insignificant, brighter, happier, and better than it was before, there the power of Christ is manifested, and the light of the Sun of righteousness shines in all its brightness. The whole world is indeed filled with the brightness of that heavenly light—so clear and penetrating, yet withal so soft and tender. Not only does it light up the mountain peaks, adding a new glory to that which is great and

glorious in itself; it also illumines with its divine radiance the lowly and peaceful valleys, the homes of humble and quiet men. Not only on the noble and lofty temples on which all the skill and wisdom of the architect have been lavishly expended, and which adorn and beautify the broad places of the city, is that heavenly light poured forth; but also through the dull, monotonous streets, through the squalid and sordid lanes and byways, it shines, giving a beauty all its own to what would otherwise be ugly and repulsive. That light we know will continue to shine for ever[1] in undimmed and undiminished glory. As our eyes are opened to take in its glory and its beauty; as our souls rejoice in its heavenly radiance; as we realize how it fills the world with its brightness, and lights up all the dark places of the earth, we bow our heads in reverence, and our hearts are filled with the spirit of joy and praise.

This, we say, is indeed "the true light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world."[2]

[1] Isaiah, lx. 20. [2] St. John, i. 9.

APPENDIX.

SHORT ESSAY ON THE "LEX TALIONIS."

The short essay which follows was originally delivered as a sermon in the parish church of Askeaton in the ordinary course of ministerial work. It is inserted here for sake of stating more fully and clearly the view adopted in the concluding lecture (p. 194) of the meaning of the Lord's comment on the "Lex Talionis," and showing the grounds on which that view is based.

One or two introductory paragraphs have been omitted, the substance of which has been already embodied in the text of the lecture.

THE "LEX TALIONIS."

St. Matth. v. 38 and sqq.

THAT the Christian standard of life does not involve the absolute rejection of the teaching of the Mosaic Law, that, on the contrary, it brings into greater prominence the spiritual principles on which the Mosaic Law was based, but which were necessarily ignored in the system of the scribes and Pharisees, is very evident in many of the examples by which our Blessed Lord illustrates and explains his assertion, "I am not come to destroy the Law, but to fulfil," &c. In these cases it is easy to see in what way the righteousness of the kingdom of heaven is something higher, deeper, and more perfect than the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees.

His treatment of the sixth and seventh Commandments involves no serious difficulty. When, again, He deals with the specific religious duties of fasting, almsgiving, and prayer, we see at once how He brings into prominence vital spiritual principles likely to be overlooked and neglected in a system so much occupied with external observances as was that of the Jewish teachers. Nor does the fact that our Lord rejects the law, "Thou shalt hate thine enemy," cause us any concern; for we cannot fail to call to mind that that rule was never any part of the divine law—the teaching of the Old Testament—but was

only a deduction drawn by the Jewish teachers themselves, as a sort of corollary from the command, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself."

But, when we come to the Lord's comment on the "Lex Talionis," the case is very different. In this case, we are reminded of the eccentric Count Zinzendorf, who once began a sermon on the text, "Think not that I am come to destroy the Law and the Prophets," with the words, "Oh, but I say you are." In this case the Lord distinctly sets aside and rejects a command which had actually formed part of the divine law given by God through Moses, and substitutes for it a command which seems to be its direct contradictory. Here, then, we certainly find ourselves face to face with a serious difficulty, a difficulty which presents itself with most startling clearness when we take into account the context in which it occurs.

That our Lord should reject a command which had been originally given by God is, in itself, sufficiently startling, but, perhaps, what really perplexes us most in the present case, is the fact that, whereas the law which the Lord rejects, commends itself to our reason and common sense, in so far as it involves a principle of justice and righteous retribution, the law which He lays down in its stead seems, on the contrary, to be utterly indefensible on any principle either of justice or expediency. Never to resist evil; always to allow the person who has smitten one on the right cheek, to smite the other also with impunity; never to defend oneself against wrong and injury—such a course of conduct, we feel, could have no other effect than that of encouraging all the violent and lawless persons in the community with the hope of exemption from justly merited punishment, without doing any good whatever to anyone. If the rule, "Resist not evil," were to be literally acted upon by all well-disposed and orderly persons, the result, we feel sure, would be the speedy and certain disorganization and destruction of the whole fabric of civilized society.

In other words, we may say that, though the "Lex Talionis"

itself may not be a moral law, yet the principle of just retribution, on which it is founded, is so; whereas the law "Resist not evil," if taken literally, seems to be the very reverse.

Perhaps we may satisfy ourselves with the reflection, that, our Blessed Lord can never have meant that this command should be taken in its naked literalness, since He Himself, on a memorable occasion, gave commandment to His Apostles, "He that hath no sword, let him sell his garment, and buy one" (St. Luke, xxii. 36), a commandment which would be utterly absurd if they were never to defend themselves against injury or wrong.

It is easy to fancy that we have sufficiently explained a passage of Holy Scripture when we have succeeded in showing *what it does not mean*, even though we may have done nothing more than reduce the Divine Word, for all practical purposes, to a dead letter. Surely in no case ought we to be more on our guard against this error than when we deal with the very words of our Divine Master.

It is not enough to say, our Lord did not mean us to take these words literally; we must still ask, What lesson did He really mean to convey to us?

It has sometimes been said that whereas the "Lex Talionis" was a judicial law intended for the guidance of Israelitish judges in the administration of justice, our Lord, in the Sermon on the Mount, was dealing mainly with the private life and conduct of individuals, that consequently, His comment must be taken as a warning against the practice of private vengeance, and that it does not in any way deal with the question of the public adminstration of justice. Even if this explanation were open to no other objection, we could not help being dissatisfied with it simply because it limits the application of the divine lesson within such narrow bounds. We feel that the Lord's words in the Sermon on the Mount ought to be of the widest possible application; that they were intended to suit all sorts of cases and circumstances in human life.

But, as a matter of fact, this explanation is open to so many objections that the more carefully it is examined the more unsatisfactory does it appear. Not only does our Lord *not* draw the distinction suggested; not only does He fail to point out, as He might easily have done, that the "Lex Talionis" was originally a judicial law, intended only to be enforced by the authority of the lawfully constituted magistrate; but He actually includes amongst the illustrations, by which He enforces His teaching, the case of a person engaged in a lawsuit in a public Court. Besides this, it must be remembered that, under every system of government, a person who has suffered any wrong or injury must himself take steps to put the machinery of the law in motion if he wishes to obtain justice; and although it may be very important, so far as the well-being of civilized society is concerned, that private persons should not rashly take the execution of justice into their own hands, but should have recourse to the help of the lawfully constituted authority, it is evident, at the same time, that, *so far as the morality of the act is concerned*, it makes no difference whether one avenges oneself in case of wrong or injury with one's own hand, or calls in the assistance of the public minister of justice.

It must also be remembered that cases sometimes occur in which it is not possible, if justice is to be done, to wait for the interference of the lawfully constituted authorities, and in which an injured person must take the law into his own hands and defend himself with his own right arm. Such cases, indeed, must have been in our Lord's mind when He gave His disciples the command already referred to, to provide themselves with weapons for their own defence.

We feel, then, that this explanation cannot satisfy us, but that we must seek for some more reasonable interpretation of the passage. When we remember that on another occasion[1] our Blessed Lord, in reply to the challenge of certain Pharisees,

[1] St. Matth. xix. 3–8.

condescended to give an explanation of his rejection of another of the Mosaic Laws—the law of divorce—we naturally turn to the passage in which that reply is recorded, in the hope that it may suggest some principle which will prove helpful to us in the present difficulty.

On what principle, then, does our Lord justify His rejection of the Law of Divorce as laid down by Moses. He declares that that law was never intended as the final or perfect expression of the divine will; that it was simply a *first lesson* suited to the capacities of those who received it—a gracious accommodation to the condition of men whose moral and spiritual condition was not as yet such as would qualify them for receiving and understanding the perfect law. "Moses, for the hardness of your hearts, suffered you to put away your wives; but from the beginning it was not so." The perfect law, as laid down by our Lord, was indeed involved in the original institution of the marriage state, but it was necessary that men should be trained up gradually and by progressive steps to understand fully the meaning of that holy institution.

Thus, to look at the matter from a slightly different point of view, the Mosaic law of divorce was not to be regarded as a divine sanction given to the dissolution of the marriage tie, but rather as a wholesome and salutary check upon the unrestrained license into which men would naturally be led in the indulgence of evil passion. The Mosaic law went a certain distance in imposing such a restraint. Our Lord goes farther still in the same direction when He sets forth His own perfect law.

Can we apply a similar principle of interpretation in the case of our Lord's treatment of the "Lex Talionis"? In the first place we may observe that the "Lex Talionis" is a law of revenge. The desire for vengeance, as distinguished from a love of justice is, alas! only too natural to fallen man; so natural that the expression, "Revenge is sweet," has almost passed into a proverb. It is very natural to us to wish to *pay off* the person who has done

us any wrong or injury, and to feel that in paying him off we somehow get *satisfaction* for the wrong that has been done to us. We find it hard to realize, that we do not really undo a wrong which has once been done by inflicting pain or suffering upon the wrong-doer, hard to feel that when justice and the welfare of society require that such pain or suffering should be inflicted, we should have no room for any other feelings than those of infinite compassion towards the erring brother whose misdeeds have brought upon him their just and natural recompense, that instead of rejoicing in the sufferings of others, even when those sufferings are most fully merited, we should rather sorrow that the sins of men should render the infliction of stern punishments so necessary in this sinful world.

But, if it is hard for us in this nineteenth century of the Christian era to realize the sinfulness and folly of revenge, and to embrace, with sincere hearts, the nobler principles of love and compassion, how very much harder must it have been for those to whom, "in old time," the Mosaic law was given? Surely, it was needful in this case, no less than in the case of the law of marriage, "that for the hardness of their hearts" a first lesson should be mercifully given them, that an imperfect law—not as yet expressing the fulness of the divine will—should be imposed upon them, from which, in time, they might be led on to the understanding of the perfect law.

Looking at the matter from this point of view, we must regard the law, "An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth," not as a divine sanction of the lawfulness of revenge, but rather as a wholesome check and restraint put upon the indulgence of evil passion. A very little reflection upon the facts of human nature will suffice to show us that this is so.

We value ourselves so highly—every man has so keen a sense of his own dignity and importance that he feels he cannot over-estimate the greatness and grievousness of any wrong or injury inflicted on his dear and precious self. Consequently, when we are wronged or injured we can never feel quite

satisfied with inflicting a punishment exactly equivalent to the wrong done to us. The natural man desires to pay off the offender who has injured him with interest or with compound interest. He must be avenged seven-fold, or even seventy-fold.

Here the law of Moses comes in with its wholesome restraint upon the indulgence of the evil passions of hatred and desire of vengeance—passions which are so natural to sinful men—so fatal and dreadful in their consequences. You must not forget, it says, that your brother's life, his person, and his property are just as sacred and just as precious as your own. The injury you inflict upon him is just as grievous to him, and causes him as much pain, as the similar injury he has inflicted upon you causes you. Revenge yourself, therefore, if you must do so, but be careful only "to give stroke for stroke," to exact no more than eye for eye, and tooth for tooth. Let not the evil spirit of revenge so take possession of you as to lead you to inflict more grievous injury than that which you have suffered.

If we would complete the parallel between the law of divorce and the "Lex Talionis," may we not say, in this case also, "From the beginning it was not so"? As the story of the creation, as told in Genesis, sets before us the sacredness of the marriage tie, so also does it teach us no less clearly the two great lessons of the nobility of man and the brotherhood of all men. It tells us how "God made man in His own image and likeness"; it proclaims to us that "God has made of one blood all nations of men to dwell upon the earth." (Acts, xvii. 26.)

From these two principles, rightly understood, the higher lesson taught by our Blessed Lord in the Sermon on the Mount ought surely to follow as a necessary consequence. We feel, then, that our Lord is really unfolding the perfect law—the law suited for the true children of God, who desire to be "perfect as their Father which is in heaven is perfect," when He sets aside this temporary provision of the Mosaic Covenant.

The Christian, if he is obliged to inflict punishment on an evil-doer who has wronged him, must not think that he is taking an eye *for* an eye, or inflicting a stroke *in payment for* a stroke received. If it is necessary for him to inflict pain or suffering, he must not rejoice at the thought of the misery he causes, but must rather grieve that such pain or suffering should be necessary.

Thus we see that our Blessed Lord lays down for us a law that is truly moral, in the highest sense of the word; that it is a law very needful for us, inclined, as we are, to cherish the sinful feelings of hatred and revenge; and, further, that it is a law applicable to all sorts of cases and circumstances, from that of the judge meting out a stern sentence of justice on a wretched criminal, to that of the peaceful traveller who, in defence of person and property, shoots the highwayman who has attacked him on some lonely moor.

It is sometimes hard to draw the line between the righteous spirit of satisfaction in the administration of justice, and the evil spirit which rejoices in the suffering inflicted on one who has wronged us; hard, when some atrocious criminal, whose deeds have filled our souls with righteous indignation, gets the due recompense of his deeds, not to rejoice that he who has caused suffering to others shall, in his turn, be made to feel the bitterness of suffering himself.

But, in proportion as we are filled with the Spirit of that Divine Lord, who gave His life so freely for a world which hated Him and cast Him out; in proportion as we grow into His perfect image and likeness, we shall find that the spirit of divine compassion for the erring and sinful brother—no matter how great his sins and errors may have been—will overcome and cast out the worldly spirit which rejoices in the misery and suffering which his evil deeds have brought upon him.

The thought of all the misery and sorrow caused by the sins of men in this world of ours will fill our hearts, more and more,

with an earnest desire for the salvation of our erring brethren from the ways of sin and destruction, and will, at the same time, teach us to look forward, and pray with more heartfelt earnestness for the coming of the perfect Kingdom, in which there will be no more need for punishment, because there will be no more crime, no more wrong-doing, but in which all God's children shall live together in perfect obedience to the higher law of love.

THE END.

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